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Desolation angel : Jack Kerouac in America, 1922-1969.

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DESOLATION ANGEL

JACK KEROUAC IN AMERICA, 1922-1969

A Dissertation Presented

By

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ABSTRACT

DESOLATION ANGEL

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February, 1978

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The struggle between bohemian and traditional artists is an old one, but that struggle assumed especial significance in the decade of the fifties in post-World War II America, when the conservative establishment largely defined by the New Critics then dominated American literature as no group has before or since. In September of 1957, the Viking Press published Jack Kerouac's On the Road, and with Allen Ginsberg's "Howl," the age-old battle of literary visions was rejoined. Insofar as we can see in 1977, the battle was "won" by the so-called Beat Generation of Kerouac, Ginsberg, William Burroughs, Gary Snyder, Gregory Corso, and the near-mythical Neal Cassady. Their message of personalism, mysticism, and anarchism permeates--in a variety of frequently peculiar forms--our culture.

Jack Kerouac was a most unlikely "revolutionary." He was, in fact, a conservative Roman Catholic mystic who became so committed to his aesthetic muse that he rejected traditional expectations of style and content, and in so doing, joined Charley Parker and Jackson Pollock as the major artists of the post-war avant garde.

More, Kerouac was consciously what he called a "recording angel" of his times, and his life documents with great perception and accuracy the historical changes of America in his life time. A child of popular culture--the "Shadow," jazz, movies--he ended his literary career by deeply, albeit often unwillingly, affecting that popular culture with his own vision.

His story is a sad one, for it ends in tragic assaults by the critical establishment, alcoholism and death. But his enduring devotion to his art--in the face of a nation tormented by cold war fears, hypocrisy, and philistinism--is profound, often moving, and worthy of close study.

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PREFACE

> History is hard to know, because of all the hired bullshit, but even without being sure of "history" it seems entirely reasonable to think that every now and then the energy of a whole generation comes to a head in a long fine flash, for reasons that nobody really understands at the time--and which never explain, in retrospect, what actually happened.
>
> Hunter Thompson

Though Dr. Thompson's comments were meant for another era, upon reflection they seem to apply as well to the activities of Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Neal Cassady, John Holmes, and William Burroughs--the members of the so-called "Beat Generation." This small group of writers and poets created a body of profoundly significant art, and deserves study if only for aesthetic reasons. But even more to the point of this work, their art and their lives are a major statement on the historical changes of the United States of America in the period following World War II, and it is to that particular end that I undertook this labor.

Although I have worked within the context of a deep respect for scholastic accuracy, I have yet researched and written the saga of alienated American prophets whom I regard as my spiritual and intellectual ancestors. In a world that faces a potential ecological and spiritual apocalypse, I respectfully submit that the legend of these psychic

pioneers is of crucial necessity in order that we might be able to understand our present reality. Insofar as my abilities permit, I am the keeper of the records.

This work has spanned madness and death and love, and ineradicably altered my life. However trite it may be to say so, I gained most not from what I read, however illuminating, but from the people I met.

I enjoy saying thank-you, and after five years, the time has at last come. To Christopher Byrnes, a student of Jack Kerouac before me, who suggested this book; thank-you. Henry Hays Crimmel, my St. Lawrence University professor of philosophy and the greatest teacher I have ever known, helped me to learn the beginnings of how to think. His St. Lawrence colleagues Robert B. Carlisle, Jack Culpepper, Jonathan G. Rossie, and Robert S. Schwartz nourished my interest in the study of history. At the University of Massachusetts, Mrs. Ann Langevin, the custodian of Herter Hall, fed me cake, tea, and sympathy, in the late and difficult hours of research. Mrs. Paula Mark made that university's library work for me.

A book about a wanderer requires travel. On the road I encountered a plethora of generous people--friends of Kerouac even when they did not know him--who made my work possible. In Kerouac's home town of Lowell, Greg Zahos

introduced me to the world of Nikky's Cafe, and Jay Pendergast got me drunk enough to understand the vortex that is that eery village. Above all, Tony Sampas made a thousand things possible, and I am impossibly indebted to him. Tony is a good person, one of the finest men I will ever know, and having his friendship is one of this project's greatest benisons.

In New York City I met Lucien Carr, another saint, and Alfred G. Aronowitz, with whom I was to work for three years, in the process learning something of how to write. The Columbia University Archives are managed by Mimi Bowling and Henry Rosen, and I bless them. During my visits to the City, I stayed with four people who became friends. Their hospitality was gracious, unstinting, and life saving; Ed D'Allessandro, John Hurley, Gerry Mooney, and Steve Buccieri. Last of all in Manhattan I found Marshall Clements, in many ways Kerouac's greatest guardian, and another man I am honored to call friend. In San Francisco I was made a guest of Travis and Bobby Absher, truly kind hosts.

Two of Kerouac's most intimate comrades have enriched me beyond measure with loving fellowship, gentle criticism, and unfailing generosity; John Clellon Holmes and Carolyn Cassady. It is perhaps their love for Kerouac and their own beauty that taught me most of the man.

My extended family of friends and loved ones

cherished me through the hard times and forced me to a higher and clearer perspective: Ed and Corinna Smith, who fed me and gave me refuge when I most needed it; my sister Maggie McNally, who loved me even when I didn't deserve it; Jack Murphy, Suzanne Wilson, Kathy Berson, Kate Carlson, and Patrick Johannesen of Amherst; Georgie Feltz of Berkeley, who helped in the crunch; my road companion Jeff "Bear" Briss; my dear friends Sarah Grambs, Meredith Manning, and Joe Cotter; my brother Robert E. Stokes--no man ever had a finer one; my sister Eileen Geoghegan, who is an artist of life and perception; and Mary Carmen Driscoll, who taught me how to love.

Next to last, but the reverse of least, I thank Stephen B. Oates, who accepted an absurd topic with the encouragement I needed, endured my misplaced modifiers and multiple gerunds with endless patience, gave me the freedom I needed, and made, all-in-all, this work possible. Thank-you Steve, and thank you one and all.

This book is dedicated to my three parents; my late mother, Mrs. Adeline Jacobson McNally, my late father Reverend John FJ McNally Jr., and my mother, Mrs. Gertrude Homans McNally.

To all of you, living and dead; L'chaim.

C H A P T E R I

IN THE SHADOW OF A CRUCIFIX

> The Town is [Lowell]. The Merrimack River, broad and placid, flows down to it from the New Hampshire hills, broken at the falls to make frothy havoc on the rocks, foaming on over ancient stone towards a place where the river suddenly swings about it on a wide and peaceful basin, moving on now around the flank of the town, on to places known as Lawrence and Haverhill, through a wooden valley, and on to the sea and Plum Island, where the river enters an infinity of waters and is gone.
>
> Jack Kerouac

Caught between the plain and the hills, the Merrimack river bends to create a vortex at Lowell, a swirling center that draws in human experience the way a crystal focuses light. The water rushing over the rocks generates simple physical energy, and factory building Americans came to exploit that energy. But the great liquid arc inscribed below the falls made it a magic place long before the Yankee industrialists arrived. It is somehow a center, a place where human experience is intensified, made meaningful in ways beyond the ken of ordinary knowledge. And it is a dark place. Near those falls, Henry David Thoreau was moved to exclaim, "If it is not a tragical life we live, then I know not what to call it." Always, the river is the source, both for the subtleties of mood and perception, and the grosser realities of labor and commerce.

Francis Cabot Lowell understood the river's power, and cut its curve with a canal and a dam, creating the first

industrial town in America, home to dozens of swiftly grimy red brick shoe and textile mills. Long rows of cheap wooden boarding houses surrounded the red brick core, sheltering the thousands of workers who fled the boredom of their Vermont and New Hampshire farms for the opportunities of industry. But the tenements were houses, not homes, and that was one of the things that marked Lowell as different; from the beginning, it was a place for the alienated, those disjuncted from a rooted past. First came Yankee farm women, "the nuns of Lowell" as one writer called them, then hungry Dubliners, then late in the 19th century equally ravenous Greeks. But the largest group of immigrants came not by sea but by land, drifting from the frigidly hardscrabble farms of Quebec through the small towns above Lowell before reaching the factories on the Merrimack. One of those towns was Nashua, New Hampshire, and two of those immigrants were Leo Alcide and Gabrielle Levesque Kerouac.

Born in Canada, both Leo and Gabrielle grew up in Nashua, a town which down to its pink suspenders, straw boater hats, and popcorn stands, resembled nothing so much as a Norman Rockwell painting. Daughter of a mill worker who had prospered to the point of owning a small tavern, Gabrielle was orphaned at fourteen and forced into the lonely servitude of New England factory life. She went to work at the local shoe shop, earning along with her wages the permanently blackened fingertips of a skiving machine operator. Short and pudgy, she had rosy red

cheeks and glossy black hair that was usually caught back in a colorful ribbon. Though she maintained an attractive and serene presence, there was a bitter mass of hurt behind the constant smile and sunny disposition; marriage and family had rescued her from total dependence on the shop, but the long years of dreary work had left her with a gnawing, frustrated desire for better social standing. As the years passed, that corrosive envy would rise increasingly to the surface of her personality.

For his part, Leo was a squat but muscular man, stood five seven and weighed two hundred pounds. A soft beer belly falling over his belt marked him as an archetypal aging athlete. An insurance salesman, he was a card playing, whiskey drinking "man's man," jovial and virile, with a great booming laugh, huge gnarled hands, a thick and muscular neck, and a bulbous -- and indubitably French -- nose. He shared with his wife an easy disposition for both misty-eyed sentimentality and laughter, but his eyes, though the same bright blue as Gabrielle's, were more imposing, perhaps because of his almost solid black bar of eyebrow. It was almost constantly in motion, and when he was startled, it bounced in accent to his surprise, along with the fat cigar usually stuffed into one corner of his broad mouth.[1]

It was a strong and happy marriage, and by 1922 they had two children; pretty three year old Caroline ("Nin"), and five year old Gerard, a pale, sickly victim of rheumatic fever.

On March 12, 1922 Gabrielle gave birth to her third and last child, Jean Louis Lebris de Kerouac. It was a propitious day to begin a life. A thaw had mellowed the long Lowell winter; the air was soft and the crusty snowdrifts were beginning to vanish. Secure in her experience, she elected to have this child at home, in their apartment at 9 Lupine Road. Throughout the afternoon she had twisted on the big brass bed underneath the crucifix; at 5 P.M., as a red sun set and the factories emptied out, Gabrielle gave birth to a fat baby boy.

By the time Jean was three, 9 Lupine Road was not big enough for the Kerouacs. It was only the bottom floor of a traditional shingled New England wooden double decker, and the porches looked straight out the street, for there was no yard. Besides, Leo was prospering; the year after the birth of his second son, he had opened his own business, a print shop which did job work and published The Lowell Spotlight, a small circular which featured theatrical and political news.

They moved first to a small white cottage at 35 Burnaby St. Quiet and shady, it was a good place to raise children, but problems with the landlord forced another move that year, this time to 34 Beaulieu St. While not so "pastoral," the new location did eliminate the long walk to school Nin and Gerard had faced. St. Louis Parochial school was now only one block away, and in fact they could see the rear of the new school building from their upstairs window.

Beaulieu Street was a rich set for the theatre of Jack's childhood. Though open space was minimal and the identical two-story frame houses loomed straight out on the street, it was a lively block, a true neighborhood full of talkative people. Sitting on his front steps, Jean could turn left and see the Greenalgh Public School at the end of the block. To his right lay West 6th St., with stores, bars, a lumber yard and a firehouse. St. Louis Parish covered the next block over with its school buildings, convent, parsonage, and the church itself. Beyond lay fields and a brook.

For Ti-Jean--little Jack in the Quebecois patois--the best part of the day was suppertime, when his family returned from work and school. Though sometimes big brother Gerard would take him for a walk on pleasant Sunday afternoons, usually Jean remained at home, confined to the miniscule front yard. But sunset would bring Papa home from the print shop and Memere from the mill, and the five of them would sit down and devour hamburger and boiled potatoes, or perhaps Ragout d'boutelle, pork meatball stew with onions and carrots and potatoes, and giant slices of fresh bread from the neighborhood bakery. After dinner, the children would assault Leo's lair behind the potted plant, and filling even his enormous lap with their squirming selves, demand that he put down his paper and cigar and perform their favorite animal noises. It was a warm and secure world when the roars, barks, and slithers came from Papa. And then up to bed, with--

if they were good--a special tale from Memere, who had the gift of a silver tongue when it came to stories for her children.[2]

But their peace was invaded by the specter of disease. Gerard had always been frail, and now aged nine, his puny body weakened steadily with rheumatic fever.

Clad in his school uniform of long black stockings, knickers, high button shoes and Raskolnick parochial shirt, a soft lock of light brown hair falling over his gentle blue eyes, the first born Kerouac seemed more angelic than human. The excitement and exertions of outdoor sports were never within his means, and as time passed and his relapses grew more frequent, he stayed home with Ti Jean more and more often. For Jean, of course, it was great fun to have his big brother home to entertain him. Dressed in his striped pajamas, Gerard would perch on his bed and, with Ti Jean as an adoring audience, draw boats and bridges, lambs and birds. When his sketches bored his little brother, he would turn to his Erector set, constructing immensely complicated marvels. At times, Ti Jean would simply shout some nonsense word. "Gerard, faire mue un rituntu!" And obediantly, Gerard would conjure up something sufficiently outlandish to entrance the younger boy for hours in taking it apart and putting it back together, chewing on the edges for good measure.

Gerard was more than a young Leonardo da Vinci to his young disciple; he was also St. Francis of Assisi, gifted with an almost supernaturally tender love for all the living

creatures he encountered. The lesson came in the form of a mouse squirming in a trap by the fish store on West 6th St. It was a simple gesture to free the animal and take it home, but Ti Jean would remember the simple purity of Gerard's motions, and even more sharply the gross bleakness in the unseeing eyes of the men spitting and talking on the corner. Next to Gerard's "perfect" example of brotherhood, all the world seemed dingy, gunnysack crude to the immaculate lace chalice cloth of Gerard's sensibilities. Jack pressed closer to his brother, idolizing this hero of the heart and soul. When they discovered the animal's tail leering out of Gigi the cat's mouth the next morning, their horrified tears were not for a rodent but for a martyr to their own church of love.

Imprisoned for longer and longer periods in his bed, St. Gerard followed in his predecessor's path by trying to preach to the birds. Spreading crumbs on the window sill, Gerard would pipe the thin cry of "vien, vien, vien," to the sparrows cheeping in the big maple tree in the back yard. The birds refused to approach, and their wariness confused Jean. After all, his brother was pure goodness; didn't Memere remind him of that all the time? Forced into docile sweetness by his health, Gerard set an impossible standard of behavior for his normal and rambunctious younger brother. Jean could worship his senior as a saint, but he was much too energetically healthy to emulate him. As he wasted away, Ger-

ard's body grew pale and light, almost ghostly; Jean's robust vitality seemed nearly criminal in such a sanctified light.

As Gerard weakened, the house grew quiet. Nin no longer brought her friends home, and their parents' wild parties ceased. The family simply drew together, watching the child suffer, like the Christ that loomed with his bloody, thorn-crowned head on the kitchen calendar.

In December of 1925, Gerard came home for the last time. Unable to remain in school, he stayed in bed with swollen legs and tortured lungs. More and more often, as Ti Jean lay in the big crib on his side of the room, haunting sounds would cut through the darkness. First the sound of Gerard's breathing; the rasp would grow louder into panting gurgles that ended in the frightening choke of strangulation. Then Gerard would awaken, and Jean could hear the tears of a little Catholic boy who had absolved himself before God. "Why do I hurt?" Gerard whimpered. "I confessed . . ." As the months passed, the whimpers became shrieks, the quiet sobs screams of agony. Always, Memere would scurry in, clad in her old brown bathrobe, and hold her child to her body.

But nothing helped. Ti Jean borrowed Nin's holy pictures and spread them around Gerard's bed, but it did no good. The constant visits of the parish priest and Gerard's teacher-nuns gave a black-robed stamp of authority to Jean's private certainty that his brother was a saint, but the visits

could not save him, and after all the pain, on July 8, 1926, Gerard finally died. Ti Jean was happy, for he knew that "my brother's gone away to heaven now."[3]

The little boy was wrong; Gerard never really left at all. It was far more than his portrait on the mantel that haunted the Kerouacs. Their shared misery had been too intense; the blade had cut too deep, had left wounds that would never truly heal. Leo stopped going to Mass, and took a special pleasure in the scandalous habit of eating hamburgers on Friday. The nervous strain had robbed him of his faith; it snatched the very teeth out of Memere's mouth, and every clack of her dentures served to remind her of their loss. Her vicious frustration at this crux in her life spilled over acid-like onto her remaining son. Baby that he was, he was sure that she loved Gerard more than him, that somehow his brother's death was his fault. Gerard the first born, Gerard the hero, Gerard the Saint; his brother's example terrified Jean, plagued him with a model to which he would always be inferior. In the shadows cast by Gerard's "holy light" on the darkness of his family's grieving, Ti Jean, and later Jean, and Jacky, and Jack, could never quite see pragmatic adult grays and degrees, but only black and white, ultimates of good and evil born of deepest psychic hurt that had little to do with anyone else's ideas of reality. Convinced he could never really be good, he believed only that he was evil, and became afraid of the good even

as he searched for its grace. Obsessed with a pure being snuffed out of his life, Jack could never be ordinary, "normal;" that would not measure up to Gerard the hero. He would never be able to follow the standard life of job, marriage, and children, for he could not risk the agony of further failure. His glimpse into the abyss that was Gerard's grave had filled his mind with an apocalyptic awareness of life and death, good and evil, that forever trapped him Hamlet-like in confused pain, in the paralyzed sensitivity of one who felt tremendously, but could not act. He tried to be his brother, and acquired a neighborhood reputation as an eccentric for preventing his friends from torturing animals. But when, night after night, the darkness overcame Jean and he fell into the comforting brown warmth of Memere's bathrobe as Gerard had done, it was mental rather than physical pain that drove him.

Clinging to his mother, Jean endured the funeral and watched silent workmen close the coffin lid over his brother's emaciated frame. With a silver crucifix clasped between white fingers, the tiny body disappeared under wood and clods of dirt. But he remained in Jean's mind, a cancerous spiral worm of guilt that twisted forever, reminding him of a strangely chill day in July and of the perfect child he could never be.[4]

As if to flee such phantoms, the Kerouacs soon moved to 320 Hildreth St. Ironically, their nearest neighbors

included a funeral home on one side and a cemetary on the other. The new house was grotesquely ugly, its windows erupting helter skelter and the roof jutting out every which way. There the first edge of grief dulled; Papa came home in the evening and roared, Memere told her stories. Bereft of his brother's entertainment, Jack was forced to play alone, his chubby fingers casting flickering shadows of huge birds and tiny men onto his bedroom wall. He would play alone through most of his childhood, creating his own games, and his own world.

As he grew a little older, he emerged from his room and home--Memere's place--into the excitement of his father's world. He and Nin even went out to the movies at the Royal Theater. Leo's Spotlight Press printed the Royal's tickets, and some of them went free to Leo Kerouac's children. Armed with their passes, Nin and Jean walked into a pink and gilt neo-Moorish crystal crazy palace that was another reality entirely. When Jack and Nin visited the Royal, the dancing images were still black and white, yet at that they were a thousand times more colorful than Lowell's red brick walls.

Safe in the sweet darkness of the theater, Jack found a reality of the imagination that was free of the strictures of Lowell, an environment of whirling kaleidoscopic energy that charmed him completely. Sagebrush and sand, white hats and Colt 45s, tin Lizzies, telephones, and raging stallions; they had passed through the screen into the uproariously funny

world of Hoot Gibson, which had nothing at all to do with the grimy 'real world,' where Tom Mix incarnated virtue and always emerged victorious, a place, later, where "there isn't any trouble," over the rainbow to the magic Land of Oz. Most especially there was the wild West, and for years he stalked his neighborhood mentally armed and ready for Bad Bart or any other desperado, one in fantasy with every boy in America.

Sometimes the whole family would benefit from another Spotlight customer, the inner sanctum of Leo's masculine world, B. F. Keith's vaudeville theater. Backstage Leo played poker and swigged illegal whiskey (for these were the days of Prohibition), sharing a bottle with W. C. Fields and other glamorous showpeople; Ti Jean sat in the audience and fell in love with silent, smiling Harpo Marx.[5]

After such excitements, Lowell seemed slightly humdrum, but the town was too complex to stay boring for long. All of Jean's homes had been in Centerville, the largest of the city's three French-Canadian districts, located on the east bank of the Merrimack. North of Centerville, curving west to follow the bank of the sharply turning river, the Pawtucketville district rose above the waters. The two were separated by Pine Brook, which entered the Merrimack just at the point where the river turned. North of both communities lay the Dracut woods.

"Little Canada" was the oldest and most interesting

French district, and it lay across the river in downtown Lowell. Leaving home, Jean and Nin would walk hand in hand, emerging from Centerville's trees and houses onto the Aiken St. bridge. Staring across the water, his face pouting slightly in concentration, Jean could see nothing but red brick, for downtown, nicknamed the "Mile of Mills," was lined with the factories which were the town's heart. Five and six stories high, the mills on clear days would seem half blue, thanks to the river reflected in their hundreds of tiny windows. Passing between the corridors of brick, they entered Little Canada, with its endless rows of densely packed three and four decker wooden tenements, porches in front and behind inter-connected by zigzagging stairways.

Because of his chubby hands, he was called Ti Pousse now, "little thumb." Clad in high shoes and overalls, he would trot on up Aiken St. to Merrimack Street, the town's main avenue. St. Jean de Baptiste Church stood on the corner, a cathedral of mighty Gothic stone which loomed as testament to the sweaty sacrifices of the neighborhood's faithful. Turning left down Merrimack, on the right lay "The Acre," once the home of the Irish, now filled with coffeehouses and stores offering delicacies from Athens. Skipping by the red brick Congregational Church and its near-twin, the Green Public School, Nin and Jean arrived at a second treasure house, the Lowell Public Library. It had no gilt or

crystal, but grand limestone steps and sternly imposing dark mahogany woodwork. Downstairs the children's room held delights like Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm, The Bobbsey Twins, and for more serious moments, The Little Shephard of Kingdom Come. From the first, Jean was a confirmed print addict, and the library became one of his homes.

Back outside on the library steps, Jean was on the edge of downtown. Next door was the enormous Gothic City Hall, whose seven-story clock tower could be seen from home. Further on lay more factories, railroad yards, the Y.M.C.A., the High School, and downtown, where he could find the Bon Marche department store, the Waldorf cafeteria, and more movie theaters. The Royal was in Little Canada, but the Capital, the Rialto, the Strand, Crown, Keith, Victor and even more were downtown, all with two different shows a week, a storehouse of images that failed to absorb him totally only because he lacked the money to see every show.[6]

But such glories were like bits of paper swept away by an overpowering whirlwind, for his young mind had encountered something richer still--the terrible Holy Majesty of the Roman Catholic Church. In September 1928, Jean followed in Gerard's footsteps and began to attend the St. Louis Parochial School.

His religion went deeper than school of course; the church was as much a part of his French Canadian heritage as the leaden coldness of Quebec. Born under the bloody terror

of the crucifix, his earliest memories the black rustling skirts of the nuns visiting Gerard, the church was his destiny. Already it had struck him with an intensity that far surpassed the American attitudes to which he had been born; he had had a vision.

Glowing with some horrible phosphorescent light, Christ or the Virgin Mary had pushed at the foot of his bed one otherwise calm Saturday night. There was no sound; the words froze terrified in his throat. Later that evening he saw a more pleasant spirit, a Santa Claus elf, slam his door. There was no wind, and this time he was able to call out to Memere, "Qui a formez ma porte? (Who slammed my door?)". Peacefully scrubbing Nin's back in the tub, Memere answered with cheerful ignorance, "Parsonnes voyons donc." He told no one. It became merely another twist of guilty confusion turning in his brain.

The Sisters of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary at St. Louis' did not serve the Lord in so dramatic a fashion, but Christ--and to some degree fear--was no less a part of their school. It was not a very long walk past the cemetary every morning, though there was a slight detour around the Greenalgh Public School; an obediant student, Jean had believed when Sister told him that Protestant children had tails. He'd come crunching across the gravel, put away a lunch heavy with the ripe fragrance of bananas, give his hair a quick and futile swipe of the comb, and race upstairs to his classroom. The sun shining through the windows illuminated

an ordinary elementary school classroom; chalk dust hanging in the air, long blackboards and carved up wooden desks. Above the blackboard hung the crucifix that so absorbed Jean, and in one corner of the room was a shrine to the Virgin.

Loving as she may have been, the Sister, like the later Brothers, looked to the nervous Jean like a "great big black angel with huge fluttering wings." Pale and almost wrinkle free, her sallow features as delicate as lace, she was as distant as the chalice upon the altar, as untouchable as the communion wafers offered by the priest. She was Mother of Thought, totally devoted to her church and her pupils.

A good and happy student who never missed a day, Jean quickly learned the first lesson of the nuns; obediance to authority. Rooted deeply in both the Church and French Canadian culture, submission was the primary demand, and the nuns enforced it by inexorably swift and painful raps on the knuckles with heavy metal-edged rulers. Hovering about their charges in the black robes of authority, the Sisters embodied not only the perfection of virtue which the children were presumably seeking, but also the power that enforced the search for perfection. In the church and in the school, there was no doubt as to who was boss. As perfect as Gerard--or almost--they reinforced Jean's guilty association of failure with goodness, and convinced him of his own loathsome sinfulness. Too, they initiated him into the ancient cult of the virgin-whore, the notion that women were either good--like Memere, like the Sisters--

or evil. In later years, the cult would entrap him; any woman who could associate with so sinful a man as he must indeed be a whore. The perverted power of Church-authorized Rightness cut into his brain with every smack of the ruler.[7]

All of this seemed ordinary enough to young Jean, and neither the discipline nor the work nor even most of the tests differed very greatly from what was at the Greenalgh Public School around the corner. One book and one hour of the day made the crucial difference. At the daily religious hour, the Sister handed Ti Jean the most important book of his young life, The Baltimore Catechism.

Nearly 2000 years of human experience, agony and ecstasy, faith and struggle, were distilled in the thin volume Jean held. His eyes fell first on the "lamby gray strangeness" of Boucher's engravings, but soon enough he began to memorize the words, absorbing the meaning without conscious effort. During the first year Sister taught him to genuflect. Lightly tapping his forehead, abdomen and breasts in the Sign of the Cross, he bowed his head and dropped to one knee, kneeling before the power of the Lord. By the second year the children were preparing for May First Communion, studying without letup basic Church doctrine, as the Nun threw questions like darts from the front of the room. "Jean, who made us? Jean, why were we made? Jean, what must we do to find the happiness of heaven?" Adrenalin

would flash through the Sister's target and standing by his desk, Jean's answers had to be just as precise. "Sister, God made us to show forth his Goodness, and we must know, love and serve Him to reach heaven."

As winter melted into spring, Jean learned of God, Sin, and Penance, and of the magnificent crashing rhythm of the Apostle's Creed, the poetic summing up of the Christian faith. "Jean, where do we find the chief truths taught by Jesus Christ through the Holy Catholic Church?" Jean began, "The Apostle's Creed, Sister: 'I believe in God . . . who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered . . . was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell . . . arose again . . . ascended into heaven, and sitteth next to God. I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen." With a quick crossing of head and heart, he would resume his seat, and receive the Sister's approval; "Bon fait, Jean."

Complex, terrifying, and fulfilling, the Church's sacraments embraced the whole of life, from Baptism at birth and Confirmation in childhood to the rite of Marriage and the Extreme Unction of death. Some souls even took the ultimate step of entering an Order, and Sister encouraged all the children in that direction. Of all the sacraments, however, none was more important than the Eucharist, when the body of

Christ was present in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and in the spring of Jean's second year in school, Sister took the students into the Church itself. St. Louis parish had begun by building an enormous foundation, but its money had run out and the parish attended Mass in the basement. Its ancient pews and concrete cross were balanced with beautiful antique mahogany confessionals and marble holy water basins, and its sacred dignity thoroughly impressed Jean.

First they learned to chant the "Hail Mary," Sister adding explanations from the Catechism. "Hail Mary, full of Grace," ("For Mary, children, was so loved by God that he allowed her to give birth to His only Son"). "The Lord is with Thee. Blessed are thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus." ("Remember, Mes cheres, it was Jesus and his sacrifice that permits you to be good Catholic children, and not pagans.") "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen."

From the altar came the Priest's stentorian voice, "Dominus vobiscum." Trembling slightly, Jean joined the parish in a whispered reply, "Et cum spiritu tuo." Like rolling thunder, the magic roar of the Mass swept him out of his body and into his soul. "Fratres, agnoscamus peccatanostra, ut apti simus ad sacra mysteria celebranta." For they did indeed celebrate a mystery, fueled by the potency,

the awful majesty of Latin, the language of incantation and worship. Ancient and glorious, it crested with the closing words that left Jean--however temporarily--safe, clean, and secure; "Benedicat vos omnipotens Deux, Pater, et Filus, et Spiritus Sanctus," ("May the Blessings of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be upon you.") Choking out an "Amen," Jean heard the priest intone, "Ite, missa est," and with a smile he rose saying, "Deo Gratias,"("Go, the mass is ended. Thanks be to God.")

At last he was seven, and ready for First Communion. Leo and Gabrielle brought him his white suit, and an aunt gave him his Communion set, the rosary beads with a beautiful golden crucifix. Jean knelt at the altar, hands locked with his classmates, and shivered as the sacred communion wafer melted on his tongue. They had confessed and received cleansing absolution the day before, and now they were junior soldiers in the Army of the Lord. Living in St. Gerard's eternal shadow, Jack took the Church and its authority more seriously than his fellow students. They knew they might be bad at times; in a confused way he was often sure that he was evil, unfit to be a true member of the Holy Mother Church.

Transcending the impact of even that occasion, he received a final sign of his fate, this time from St. Teresa-of-the-Child Jesus. A late 19th century Carmelite nun, Teresa of Lixieux preached the "little way" of simplicity

and perfection in the ordinary tasks of life, "of spiritual childhood, the way of trust, and absolute self-surrender." Her example had inspired a cult among bourgeois French--and French Canadian--people so large that she was canonized much more rapidly than the Church customarily permitted. One day after seeing a film at school which depicted Teresa's vision of a statue of the Virgin turning its head toward her, Jean went home to encounter, bathed in red light, a statue of St. Teresa turning towards him. Again he told no one; his mind divided, the child could hardly explain what he did not himself understand.[8]

Saints and sinners, priests and ramblin' gamblers--such dualities were as real for Jean as the picture of Man o' War that hung next to the portrait of Jesus on his bedroom wall. Leo could never be confused with Nicely-Nicely Johnson, but Damon Runyon would have empathized when relatives called Papa irresponsible, "like the weather," for investing more money and energy in the ponies than the Spotlight Press. As drawn to wealth as he was to virtue, Leo was a "citizen of the ranting world," and on extra special days, father and son would journey to the rantingest place of all, Rockingham Park.

A day at the races would begin early for a nervously eager Jean, and it would still be dark when he'd be washed, dressed, and combed, waiting with exquisite patience for his

snoring Papa. Finally, Leo would stumble dreamily to the bathroom, there to create a cheerful cacophany splooshing water around the sink and over himself, booming coughs erupting from his massive chest. At long last he would stand dressed and ready. Grabbing his hat and thrusting a fresh batch of Seven-Twenty-Four brand cigars into his pocket, he would take Jean's hand over Gabrielle's mixed protest and advice: "You haven't eaten! Let me fix you something. We-elll1, don't eat too many hot dogs--" The pair would depart for a day of worldly "masculine" adventure. Their first stop was for breakfast at the Waldorf Cafeteria in downtown Kearney Square, where Leo consumed great stacks of pancakes, eggs, and bacon, and Jean slowly nibbled at his food until appetite overcame his excitement. Morning passed in devoted study of the Morning Telegraph racing form at the small table next to Papa's desk at the shop, absorbing unaware the deep scent of printer's ink and the rattle of typewriters.

Finally they drove the forty minutes to the track, and fending off the sleazy tipsters who peddled "inside information, guaranteed winnahs," they found seats in the stands overlooking the perfectly manicured oval surrounding the infield. Jerked from their seats by the clang of the starting bell, they fell into the graceful rhythm of charging horseflesh as race succeeded race, interspersed with huddled consultations and quick visits to the betting window. The tote

board measured wins and losses and the size of Leo's bankroll, but it could not gauge Jean's ecstatic pleasure as he revelled in this exotic world of tiny jockeys and wise old trainers, redolent with the odor of hotdogs, horsesweat and manure. All of the extras--the special dinner in a Boston restaurant, the first-run movie on Tremont Street--were only pleasant dividends to already perfect days. The majesty of the thoroughbreds even seeped into the world of the Royal Theater.

It was a Grade B movie with a rickety plot--"Poor-young-boy-gets-big-break-and-becomes-great-jockey"--but it rekindled that divine madness, and for a year Jean dreamed of being a jockey. He was twelve then, already 110 pounds, and he prayed every Sunday that he'd not gain any more weight, running from Mass to Bailey's drug store for the only free scales in the neighborhood. Despite his fasting, reality soon extinguished that dream, so he constructed his own alternative, recreating with marbles and imagination his visits to the "Rock."

Alone in his room, Jean imagined himself as Chairman of the Board, Chief Steward, chief handicapper, boss trainer, star jockey, and owner of the greatest horse of all time, a giant ball bearing named "Repulsion." No detail was overlooked; the linoleum swept, a "trumpet" sounded a call to the races, "Dardanella" came over the Victrola as the horses paraded and, held by a ruler on the top of a Parcheesi board, the horses

werrre offandrunning! Carefully "trained" (chipped so that they would roll randomly), each marble went off at proper odds, for their past performance was carefully recorded in Jean's track newspaper; their gleeful witness completed his ritual with a careful pantomime of shredded tickets, just like his father. The conventional world of marbles, of boys in a circle of competition and furious concentration, was never part of Jean's reality; it was too normal, too ordinary. Jean's true home was the magic theater of fantasy, the exhilarating and always private stage of the make-believe. The internal mindscape of a universe of imagination would always be vastly more important to him than the day to day channel most of Lowell and the world accepted. His marbles were not agates or glassies, but thoroughbred horses.

St. Louis School remained the center of his life. The long days in the classroom fell away in dependable measure, and little changed but the name of the Sister in front. Always there was the high whine of the Boisvert lumberyard saw, and the threatening sight of the greasy ragmen with their horsecarts passing behind school on the way to the dump. At recess the boys flipped bubble gum cards against a wall, and Jean became a master, capturing pasteboards of Jimmy Foxx and the other Boston Red Sox stars.

Generally Jack was a good student, but one part of the week was torture. Confession every Friday afternoon was a rite that chewed at the unhealed scabs of his conscience, reminding him anew of his "corruptness." For most of the children, Confession was a casual experience. Pausing at the door to genuflect and make the Sign of the Cross, they walked quietly down the side aisle past the marble tablets of Jesus, then slipped through the velvet drapes into the confessional. Through with this ordeal, they murmured their prayers to God and the Virgin in front of the altar's flickering candles and were left penitently free and pure again. However, sin tortured Jean far more than it did his Priests, and all the "Our Fathers" and "Hail Marys" in the world could not exterminate the guilt worm gnawing within. Again and again he had to admit in a whisper to the unseen Father on the other side of the screen that, "Oui, mon pere, I played with mon gidigne."

Sexuality above all could not stand comparison with Gerard, and masturbation became another bar in Jean's prison of conscience. In truth, he had a life-long obsession with "jacking off," even as it seemed ultimate blasphemy to him. Since he felt at heart that he was already unspeakably vile, it was easy to give up and indulge in the aching pleasure of orgasm. His resolve to be good regularly vanished, and he would stealthily slip into the bathroom, swiftly unbutton his pants, and enter the dream world of satisfied desire. As

the pleasure faded and he scrambled about wiping up semen with a tissue, he would wind up shuddering with disgust at his gross carnality, and again vow to be like his vision of good--Gerard, the Church, Easter lilies, kittens and lambs.

He wanted so badly to be good. Christmas above all made him pensively worshipful, and he avoided the noisy, alcoholic party at home to accompany Memere and Nin to Midnight Mass. Their walk home would be slow, savoring the memories of the boys choir, the lovely scent of incense and flowers, the mellow virtousness of Joseph at the manger. But Christmas came only once a year, and he was horny every day; on the whole, worldly "evil" was so much more interesting than "goodness." Yet rather than become a prude or a degenerate, Jean--and later Jack--hung suspended between the ethical poles, fascinated by the perverse as well as the holy, unable to wholly commit himself to either, and ultimately tolerant of both.

His wanderings now carried him away from the town, and as he grew older, he discovered the Dracut Woods, lurking just a few blocks north of his house. In all seasons he roamed them, delighted by their sometimes sinister shadows, and approaching the very steps of the house that lay at its center. Something delicious and low lay there, exotic and forbidden pleasures perhaps. His private vision of enticing evil touched not only the shadows of dark forest, but the faces of Lowell's bizarre, the lurching characters of the

town's bitter streets, losers his elders met and tried never to acknowledge. Down on the garbage dump old Jean Fourchette hissed idiot-like between broken filthy teeth and out his snotty nose--"zzoo, zzzzoooooo"--and became ZouZou. Luxy Smith, an alcoholic hermit, creepily inhabited a crumbling Pawtucketville mansion. Young as he was, Jean's empathic tolerance had focused his attention on the perfect symbols of his era; lost and lonely people, zombies full of what he would later call "despair, raw gricky hopelessness, [the] cold and chapped sorrow of Lowell."[9] Hard times they called it: the Great Depression.

Lowell had been stagnant since the mills began to go South after World War I, but by 1930 it was dead and all but rotting. Two out of three workers cursed unemployed on street corners and the only good business bet in town was charity; forty percent of Lowell was on some form of welfare. Jean never missed any meals, but his eyes were too sharp to overlook the collapse one could read in the frightened eyes of men sitting on the zig-zag stairways of Little Canada, staring at silent factories. The depression was inescapable, as real as the weight of pain caught in the pictures of WPA workers in the town newspaper, the Lowell Sun. In the early '30s the Sun featured closer coverage of Al Capone and Billy Rose than it did of economics, but conservative Catholic Lowell shivered as it regularly splashed headlines like "TEAR GAS AND NIGHT STICKS USED BY

LOS ANGELES POLICE IN REPELLING COMMUNISTS" across the front page. Just 20 years earlier, Joe Ettor of the IWW had failed miserably trying to organize the local millworkers, though he'd succeeded brilliantly amongst the Italians at nearby Lawrence, and anti-radical paranoia remained thick.

Even Jean's special joy, the movies, had to respond to the disaster, and soon he could spend an entire Saturday afternoon in the comfort of the Rialto for a dime, seeing a double feature with Clara Bow in "No Limit," Lew Ayres in "Doorway to Hell," a chapter from a serial like "Finger Prints," some of the Disney magic in "Mickey's Stampede," the Newsreels and "25-count 'em-25 packages to be given away keep yer ticket stubs when you entah!" Sunk in his chair distractedly chewing popcorn, eager only for the fun to begin, Jack found the newsreels a bothersome diversion; he had to watch the bread lines and apple sellers, learn new words and phrases like Republic Steel, Harlan County, and Okie, and became all too familiar with the pinched look of hunger.

Laughter grew corrosive in the '30s, and the Sun's precious funnies adapted. Dick Tracy burst off the page like the avenging angel he was, first of the super heroes who were to vicariously solve the problems of a paralyzed America. Tracy's message was harder and more aggressive than either of Jean's old favorites, like "Wash Tubbs" (later "Cap'n Easy") and "Freckles and his Friends," or his all-time permanent

favorite, Major Hoople's own "Out Our Way." Leo's spiritual brother, the Major recalled earlier times with his gently raffish roguery. Poised over his billiard cue at the Owl's Club or lecturing the boarders at the Hoople Manor fireplace, Amos B. Hoople always had a scheme--or at least an explanation.[10] "Just one of the guys" despite his pomposity, Hoople was a fixture in the masculine realm of cigars and sports, the brotherhood whose Gods were Ruth and Gehrig, Knute Rockne and the "Gipper," whose myths . . .? But that is where things became tough and gritty once again, for the depression's primal male dream was brought in blood and hunger and pain.

Ultimately, there was only one stage for it, the square canvas ring at the center of Madison Square Garden, 50th St. and 8th Ave. in New York City. A man in an incongruous dinner jacket would stand and announce a "bout for the Champeenship of the Woild," and some hungry kid named Sullivan or Goldberg or even Louis would stalk out of his corner and grab <u>all</u> the marbles with a crushing left hook. They dreamed those dreams at the small gym Leo ran at night, and Jean watched local hopefuls pound the bags, but it was the part about Madison Square Garden that attracted him. The center . . . the source . . . the City. Home from school, when Jean turned on the radio with its brown paper speakers, the shows he loved--Jack Benny, Rudy Vallee, The Hit Parade, Amos 'n Andy--all came from the

City. "In New York" was also the name of a Sun column, and after dinner Jean could absorb gossip from the glittering world of Tex Rickard, El Morocco, and Hizzoner, the irascible Jimmy Walker.

Everything that was bright and interesting in his life, the worldly dreams and golden fantasies of the media, flowed from somewhere near Times Square, creating a contrast to Lowell that was as vital as his interior struggles between angels and demons. As the years passed, the vision of New York, the world outside Lowell, the road of adventure, would become one in his heart with the notion of enticing evil, the dangerous world he desired so deeply. Lowell town had its virtues, but the City . . . even if he would remain a townsman all his life, the City was where he would have to live, at least for a while. Once or twice the Kerouacs even journeyed to Mecca, visiting Gabrielle's stepmother in Brooklyn. Despite the depression, they were pretty well off; Leo, who earned a driver's license only later that year of 1932, was able to buy his first car, a 1928 Model A Ford, and then hire Armand Gauthier as his driver.

Prosperity and the need to be near Armand moved them all the way out of the blank box at 66 West St., their home for the past four years, to Pawtucketville, where they settled first on Phebe St. and later on Sarah Ave. With neighbors named Laflamme, Payette, and Houde, the new block was as French as all the blocks before it, and though

the new location created changes in Jean's life, most of them were welcome.

Sitting at his bedroom window on a quiet summer night, he could hear the sweet rush of water over the falls, a sound that lured him out of the house and across two hundred yards of Lowell Textile Institute campus to the sandbanks at the water's edge. The Merrimack was his watch and calendar, measuring time and life in the colors trapped upon the surface. Grim gray winter collected in the slush on the rocks, swept away by the churning brown of spring flood, in turn followed by the lush warmth of blue diamond summer.

Always the river. Just to get to St. Joseph's, his new school, he had to cross high above it on the Moody Street Bridge, and the long drop that made him ponder suicide gave him a perspective on reality that included the finish of life as well as its source.

That fall of 1932, St. Joseph's was not just a new school for Jean, but one major nexus of his Catholic education and experience. His new teachers were not delicate nuns but roaring Jesuit brothers, and they forced him to make up for the deficiencies of St. Louis' curriculum. True to the spirit of Ignatius Loyola, Jean's fifth grade achievements came on two levels; his scholarship improved so well that he was able to skip the sixth grade, and he passed ever more deeply into the sacred mysteries of the Church, becoming an Altar Boy

at the very center of French Lowell--St. Jean de Baptiste Cathedral.

Eyeing their students with the same intensity Leo used on horses, the brothers contemplated serious, dedicated Jean as a potential priest. Though a decade older, a young seminarian named Armand "Spike" Morrisette became a close friend of Jean's. The rich peace of Holy Orders stood in beatific contrast to the mundane political and ethnic brawling that consumed Lowell in the election year of 1932, when Democratic presidential candidate Roosevelt of New York came to town.

Franklin Roosevelt's golden smile blessed Jean--set free from school for the event--as his campaign motorcade glided through town a week before election day, but that was the only harmony in the discordant struggle. Excluded from the Democratic Party's largesse by the Irish first-comers, the French and Greeks were Republicans, and while Lowell gave F.D.R. a 10,000 vote plurality, it elected Republican Albert Bourgeois to the Legislature. The Irish boycott was not an abstract issue on Sarah Avenue, and Leo ranted sourly in his easy chair about the "gahdam Micks" at City Hall who refused to give the Spotlight Press any business.

St. Teresa or St. Patrick or St. Anthony; Lowell was no melting pot. Perhaps that was why it tolerated eccentricity so well, and certainly why the war of clans was not

confined "gentleman-like" to the ballot boxes. North Common in the Acre was the main Coliseum, and the gladiators were named the Acre Pirates, the Warriors, the Blackhawks, and the Riverside Gang, as the Irish played King-of-the-Mountain with the French and Greeks.[11]

Jean was no warrior, but he was even less of a Saint, and in September 1933 he saddened Spike and crossed over the line, entering the Bartlett Junior High School, a public institution set in the middle of the Acre. Leaving St. Joseph's meant more than just not going to Mass every day; for the first time in his life, Jean Kerouac no longer lived in an exclusively French world. He had learned English in the Royal at the age of six, but French had been the language of school and home, and he retained his accent until high school. At Bartlett, Kokinas and Tsotakis, Gallagher and McNally replaced the French names. Jean Louis Lebris became Jacky.

It was a liberation. In 1933, most Franco-American school boys were merely counting time until they could enter the mills, but Jacky had a book hunger in common with the local Greeks, whose drive for education was often compared to the stereotypical Jews of Brooklyn . Having crossed the Textile Bridge, Jacky turned right down Pawtucket Boulevard, past the funeral homes that had once been mill-owner's mansions, past the Franco-American Orphanage and the religious grotto he had walked with Gerard, down Wanna-

lancit Street, and into the bookish sanctuary of Helen Mansfield's classroom.

Miss Mansfield was a sort of secular nun, an aging spinster whose life was directed towards her pupils. But where the Sisters offered thorns and a crucifix, she shared dreams, spells, and enchantment. Instead of confusion and sin, Jacky encountered Natty Bumppo in the forest, or rafted the Big Muddy with Huck and Jim. He had always been a reader, but Miss Mansfield, sensing his quickness and raging joy for books, pressed great writers on him, and more. During that year, she stoked his enthusiasm to the point where he subtly turned a mental corner, and began a new road; he discovered that he could write as well as read, that in the unfettered world of the written word, he could act as well as be part of the audience.

Diaries, novels, newspapers, the form did not matter. He challenged the Morning Telegraph with a tabloid covering his own private bedroom race track, baseball diamond and football stadium. By now a complete boy of letters, he gave Miss Mansifled a short story about the Irish cop on the beat which so pleased her she read it to the class. Set free by her pleasure, Jack began to scribble into his back pocket nickel notebook a novel he called "Jack Kerouac Explores the Merrimack."

Pilgrims who come to worship the power of the Word soon discover that the entrance fee to the temple is eternal loneliness. French Canadian Lowell was not a literate place.

Save for the newspapers--L'Etoile, Le Citoyen, Le Clarion, the Sun--the town's French were uninterested in reading, and Jacky's parents were no exception. As Leo's fortunes began to dribble away, their dreams came to focus ever more intensely on their only living son, weighty expectations of a . . . a job in a brokerage firm . . . silk suits . . . a nice home in the suburbs.

Leo would counsel, "Forget this writing stuff, Jean, it'll never pay. You're such a good student, sure you'll go to college, get a good job. . . stop dreaming!"

Memere was harsher. Watching her baby slip away from her control, disappointed with his romantic fantasies of belles lettres, she finally grew vicious. And although Jean already felt in some awful way what she said, it must have been crushing to hear his own mother spit out, "You should have died, not Gerard."

Sometimes the house grew claustrophobic to Jacky, the enormous overstuffed leather and wood couches weighing down his spirits, and then it was time to escape out of the door, down to the street, and join the gang: mournful, doomtragic George "GJ" Apostalakis, the lone Greek in the circle; Roland Salvas, the sunken-chested super-spitter; silent Scotcho Boldieu and "crackbrained angel joy" Fred Bertrand. Beneath the eerie shadows of Pawtucketville

the Dracut Tigers talked, wrestled, sang, sinned, got into trouble and out of it, grew up together. Almost every young teenage boy in the town was in one of the gangs, and whether it was with a baseball or a rock, they competed on North Common, blood usually flowing either way. Several blocks away from the Acre, the Tigers usually left the fighting to others. Mostly, they played football.

The unholy mixture of physical torture and gymnastic grace that we call football goes deep into the psyche of almost every American male. Shrieking Saturday announcers had filled Jacky's ears with Red Grange and the Gipper; at six he had watched his cousins Armand and Herve go one-on-one in the backyard. Faith and ambition took him on to the field. Football was the chance--one of very few--to be somebody, not only in the hometown-hero-for-a-day sense, but in the fact that there was only one escape out of the mills for a Canuck boy from Lowell, and that was a college athletic scholarship. College, as symbolized by a complex fantasy of the Sweetheart of Sigma Chi being serenaded by Bing Crosby, was the way to the American dream, and it was worth every bruise and ache.[12]

Jacky wrote it, of course, a simple entry in the Sun sports page column of October 1935. "The Dracut Tigers, age 13-15, challenge any football team age 13-15 to a game in Dra-

cut Tigers field or any field Saturday morning." With Leo howling out victory cheers for his son, Jacky sliced the Rosemont Tigers defense for nine touchdowns, and walked home, as he said years later, "goaded on by all the fantastic and fabulous triumphs that he [saw] possible in the world."

The Tiger's second game was down and dirty. Leo managed the Pawtucketville Social Club at night, and the older boys he regularly ousted for being broke figured to shut up the old man's bragging with one fast smack in the mouth of his son, "that little Christ of a Kerouac." Rising from a pileup swallowing blood, the curse hurting much more than the punch, Jacky left cleat tracks across the offender's backside on the next play. At North Common, South Common, and Barlett Jr. High fields, he learned the code of the streets: "You win some, you lose some, but you dress for them all."

Changing games with the rhythm of the seasons, the gang shuttled from football to basketball at the "Y" or Boy's Club, spring and summer baseball in Works Progress Administration leagues, and wrestling the year around. Jacky retained his private dream world, transforming "Repulsion" into a baseball game played on a miniature backyard diamond until he lost it in the bushes, but the special magic of a Stromberg Carlson radio demanded company. Radio programs like "Flash Gordon," "Jack Armstrong," "Dick Tracy," and "Buck

Rogers" clustered around suppertime, pumping the raw stuff of fantasy and imagination into their minds.

Other times, they passed copies of pulp magazines from hand to hand until they were worn and shredded. Pure action in a stagnant present, the pulps hooked Jacky in with their first paragraphs and transported him to a land where heroic loners surpassed the impotent offical police forces and unfailingly defeated evil on the last page, all for one thin dime. Except for encouraging him to write and stimulating his interest in heroic fantasy, most of the pulps were too thin to seriously affect him. Tom Mix metamorphasized into Star Western, one of over 30 Cowboy magazines. Operator 5, only one of dozens of detective publications, established the character of honorable "hardboiled" private eye that was later perfected by one of its writers, Dashiell Hammett.[13] Soaring further out on the vectors of imagination, golden Doc Savage rose and fell in popularity with the Tigers, but there was only one champion--The Shadow.

> From thin, straight lips came a low, sinister laugh. It was a tone of knowing mirth--a foreboding mockery that carried an uncanny spell. It was a laugh that had brought terror to the underworld; a laugh that taunted friends of crime; a laugh that had marked the ending of insidious schemes, and had sounded the death knell to doomed evildoers.
>
> The author of that laugh was a mysterious being who remained invisible at night, and who disguised himself by day. He was a personage who could seemingly be everywhere; the possessor of a master mind who could frustrate the deepest schemes of crime.

> Only one pair of lips could utter that weird mockery that left no doubt of identity. The laugh of Lamont Cranston was the laugh of The Shadow!"

"Destouches'" candy store on Moody Street was a fitting place to pick up the new magazines every other Friday. Enveloped in an atmosphere of bizarre dissipation, the sweet stench of caramel and chocolate was too intense there, cloying, crystalline; the old man who lurched behind the counter was a reputed pederast, and by the time Jacky was out of the store, he was already in perfect harmony with the weird mysticism of Lamont Cranston, the Emperor of the Invisible. Unseeable, the Shadow made a perfect radio hero, and Jacky was always near a speaker as the eerie notes of the theme song, "Omphale's Spinning Wheel," floated gently out into the night. Master of the mysterious, a friend of the devil even as he destroyed evil, the Shadow penetrated to the core of Jacky's turbulent and guilty dream world with the power of a perfect fantasy, a fictional character so precisely in tune with Jacky's own gloomy thoughts that Cranston soon attained a reality to Jacky infinitely more substantial than any sophisticated adult could ever understand. Though Pawtucketville could never be quite so perfectly pitch dark as a Mott Street opium den guarded by the secrets of the Orient, Jacky became the local Shadow for a while, spooking about in slouch hat and cape, swiping small items and stealthily leaving behind tin cans with the message, "The

Silver Tin Can Will Visit You Tomorrow," until everyone on Sarah Avenue wondered who it was. Incapable of imagining her son as anything but publicly virtous, Memere was sure that it was GJ until a lady down the block caught Jacky silverhanded, and he was forced to retire.

The terrifying pressures that produced The Silver Tin Can were not so easily unmasked. By the time he was 13, Jacky was strong enough to hitchhike alone to Boston and stroll along the docks daydreaming of stowing away to Europe, but he was still fragile enough to flee to Memere's bed obsessed afresh with St. Teresa and Gerard after witnessing a stranger's death in the moonlight atop Moody Street Bridge. Driven by an overwhelming need for an impure Savior in the filth of his guilty world, Jacky reached into never-never land. If he could not be a super-hero, he could be a super-hero's friend. And so he created an imaginary companion, a legendary hero named Doctor Sax, who had come to Lowell, the myth held, to join with Jacky and destroy the World Snake of Evil in the Dracut Woods.

Seventeen years later Jack would write down the tale of "Dr. Sax, Faust Part III," embellishing it with Spengler and Jung and a thousand further details generated by an adult mind. But the core was there in his adolesence. As a fictional creation, Sax's complex lineage lay in a thousand fragments in Jacky's subconscious, as the mythical child blended of a thousand memories. Sax was the pure drawn

essence of a dark and morbid Catholic childhood--deaths and funeral shrouds, the rain and the mist, evil cellars and spider webs in your face in the dark, the terrible glitter of a phosphorescent crucifix. Sax was the Shadow's bastard child as well, with his hat, cape and invisibility, and the "mwee hee hee hee hee hee haaaaaaaa" laugh that ripped through the skin and chilled you to the bone. Sax's mother was perhaps the blank deadness in the eyes of the enslaved women of the mills, those, Jack later said, "whose phantoms were reality and work." Formed of the flickering images of the Royal, Doctor Sax's "brothers" were Bela Lugosi in Dracula, Lon Chaney in the Phantom of the Opera, and all the hidden truths in the Tibetan Valley of Lost Horizons.

Sax's conception? Ah, there Jacky's mind was almost literal, for the fantasy of Dr. Sax sprang directly from lewd sexuality, from the guilt demons that gathered inside him to watch ZouZou the town idiot masturbate himself and his dogs in a shack at the junkyard, in Jacky's voyeuristic raids on the privacy of couples humping in funky summer warmth by the river, in Jack's own adolescent homosexual fondlings and gropings. Though in the later written legend Jack placed Sax in a burrow deep in the Dracut Woods, his true home was by the river, in the shadows of the sandbanks where he had first appeared in Jacky's imagination. Solitary walks along the Merrimack that frozen

spring of 1936 were not tranquil strolls but encounters, confrontations with a friend and a lover, with the spiral guilt worm of fate. For Jacky, the fantasy was charming and palliative, soothing his fears about sin, but it needed a conclusion; either the Snake of Evil died, or surely madness would follow. The spring brought a massive catharsis.

Friday the 13th, March, 1936: Bruno Hauptmann was awaiting the electric chair that week, Adolph Hitler--about to invade the Rhineland--was the favorite subject of political cartoonists, Modern Times was the new movie in town; and to an already disturbed boy, the flood that threatened Lowell with destruction intimated not mere tragedy but the end of the world.

Winter had been cold and snowy, and the spring warmth felt especially good that year. Gleefully watching the river rise, Jacky stalked its banks singing Tommy Dorsey's new song, "I Got A Note," overjoyed that school had been let out. By noon of the 13th, the Merrimack crested at eight feet above the dam, only a thick slab of ice protecting Lowell from absolute catastrophe. As night fell, 50,000 cubic feet per second of water were smashing through Rosemont Terrace, the lowest part of town, leveling Fred Bertrand and Miss Mansfield's houses, and the Spotlight Print.

The roaring brown waters of the river no longer concurred in Jack's mind with the comfortable brown of Ma's bathrobe or the house's mahogany furniture; now the river was a raging Snake, "an unforgettable flow of evil and of wrath and of Satan barging through my home town."

Satan almost got Jack, as he would later say. Foolishly, he and a friend named Billy Chandler were playing on giant piles of ice near the sand banks when at five P.M. that terrible Friday afternoon the ice above the dam let go and only the spring of strong young legs saved his life. Like any town under siege, Lowell was relieved to see the Army Corps of Engineers troop in to protect them the next day, along with 2,500 WPA sand bag filling workers.

For the next six days the river was moderately well behaved, but by Thursday the 19th it was two feet higher than before and still rising; every mill in Lowell shut down, and Lakeview Avenue, only four feet lower than Sarah, was swamped. The city was panicking, and by the next day, downtown Lowell--including all of Little Canada--was under two feet of water, 1000 families were refugees in the Armory, and Governor James Michael Curley had called in the National Guard to prevent looting.

Having seen the death angel at so close a range, Jacky and Sax were at crisis. Nursing an arm aching from diptheria shots and a heart flayed open by the psychic whip of his guilts, Jacky had connected--down very deep in his soul--the

rage visited upon his town with his own sins, and confusedly wondered if the catastrophe was about to consume them all. In some mysterious fashion, the upsets in the patterns of his life raised by the roaring brown river at his doorstep had crested with his sexual guilts, so that Lowell's fate was intertwined, was at one with his own. As he put it sixteen years later in his written myth, the poetically elaborated recapitulation, all of Sax's potions and amulets and charms had failed, and the World Snake of Evil under Dracut Hill lived on.

But apocalypse was not yet.

> And Doctor Sax, standing there with his hands in his pockets, his mouth dropped open, uptilted his searching profile into the enigmatic sky--made a fool of--
>
> "I'll be damned," he said with amazement. "The Universe disposes of its own evil!"
>
> That bloody worm was ousted from his hole, the neck of the world was free--"

On Saturday the 20th, the river's rise halted, drawing back from Lowell with only one victim, an elderly man. When it receded, Jacky's own fears had burned out, leaving him less obsessed with filth and darkness, almost as if the river, blue once again after spring silt, had cleansed him, left him regenerated and released. As the sun came out and the waters slowed into somnolent summer normality, Jacky's crisis passed too, for reasons as imponderable--and natural--as why a flood stops. He was not whole, but

he had "fought through the fear and guilt of Catholicism," as a close friend would later write, "to acceptance of the befuddled, complex loneliness of pre-adult life--"

Divided as he was, the fissure in his personality no longer threatened to destroy him. It left him raw and open, a sensitive consciousness that would absorb more than its share of sensations, make him a little more aware than the average Dracut Tiger. Too open perhaps, since exposure implies vulnerability. But the die was cast, and his road was clear.

He was not Gerard or Memere or a Priest; he was Jacky, who stopped going to Mass about that time. It was not God but the Universe that disposed of its own evil. Nature bats last. He had reached balance.

Two months later, Jacky graduated from Bartlett Junior High, and after a summer spotting bowling pins at the Pawtucketville Social Club for his father, he was ready to walk all the way downtown to Lowell High School.[14]

Ahead lay football and romance and adulthood. The glee and guilts of childhood had assumed their proper proportion.

C H A P T E R I I

VANITY WON AND LOST

As seen from the river, its horizontal windowpane dividers erased by distance, the ugly yellow brick building called Lowell High School was unmistakably a product of the Sing-Sing school of architecture. In front, as if to guard the passing Merrimack Street public from its menacing reality, sat St. Anne's Church, a perfect plot of English Episcopalian heaven seemingly transplanted, stone and ivy, from some Shropshire common. Actually, it was built by a local factory, as was the canal on one side of the school and the perfect red brick Mason's Hall on the other. The morning walk through Little Canada to classes fixed forever the giant capitalist power of the mills in Jacky's mind; in three blocks he could see not only their beautiful material fruits, but the wretched human victims whose sweat and blood had been drained for the creation of such treasures. Sorry black-shawled ancient women went off to Mass in the morning, old dead-eyed men like golems lurched crapulous with drink to their homes at night. They were the lost, and Jack could not hurry past them sympathetic but detached, for failure had struck home. The ponies had run just a little too slow, the flushes had turned up busted just a few too many times, business had been terrible; late in 1937, Jack's junior year

in high school, Leo was forced to sell out the Spotlight to his former customers.

Heart and soul a worker, a meticulous print shop craftsman, Leo had an enduring faith in the American fantasy of success and was infected with the urge to rise. He'd been proud of the word "estate" by his name in the City Personal Property Book. In 1936, it stood at $2,900, though it did not mention the $3,000 starter loan that his friends Scoopie Dionne and Ed Dastou had made him years before, nor could it foretell that a year later it would show a $2,000 loss. Leo was a citizen of the old school, a forthrightly reactionary workingman who detested FDR's liberalism nearly as much as the members of the Union Club, and it was more than just humiliating to end up carrying water buckets for the WPA. It was a double bind of failure, however brief; no longer could he practice his respectable and honest trade, and to be dependant on "that sonofabitch . . .!!" Soured and brooding, Leo would rant on about the liberals, and Jack would defend them, though politics soon became unreal to him, and in a few years he would find himself agreeing with the old man. After a while, Leo began to find printing work, sometimes in Lowell, more often out of town. With his family center shattered, he was, as Jack would later say, "a man of mournful vision," embittered by the increasing restrictions of modern life, especially

the aggravating bureaucracy of the New Deal, endlessly warning his son that life was a hard cruel jungle--"You'll See"--and had no place for romantics. Faced only with missed opportunity and wasted potential, Leo craved better for his son, and was aghast at Jack's persistance in rejecting solid respectable work--Leo himself--for the idle fancies of "literachoor."

"I wanta write, I'm an artist," Jack said.

"Artist schmartist, Ya can't be supported all ya life," Leo replied.

Tortured by her impoverished childhood, Gabrielle was even more concerned with status seeking, to the point of snubbing Fred Bertrand--so he felt--because of his lower class manner. But Leo's collapse moved them from the small private home on Sarah Avenue to a fourth-floor tenement flat one block over at 736 Moody Street, and Jack was more than ever part of the gang.

Protected and doted on by Gabrielle, Jack had been something of a momma's boy, and in a town where boys had to scuffle up dimes to get a baseball glove, he even had a horse of his own. His ambition and studiousness separated him slightly from most of his friends. Fred Bertrand, the crazy skinny one, mostly played hooky in the brief period before he quit school entirely, as had Scotty Boldieu after his father died. Only Roland Salvas and George Apostalakis--GJ--went all the way down Merrimack St. to high school every day,

and once there, Roland took the Shop course, GJ--with a widowed mother to support--the Commercial, and only Jack was College Prep.

At the time, Jack's throwing arm was vastly more important than his report card. Home from school, he'd gobble a fast snack of Ritz Crackers and peanut butter, then spring back down four flights of stairs to join the guys for a game or just some street corner talk. He had an eye for the comic and absurd that lent ordinary events something extra. GJ's Lefty Grove-inspired windup left Jack in hysterical laughter on first base, and his own grandiosely exaggerated side-line descriptions had the same effect on everyone else. He'd always told them "I'm gonna be a writer," and from the beginning he practiced with his mouth, snatching up his more pedestrian friends into the furiously inspiring dream world he alone could concoct. It was true that, if they refused to share his fantasy, he might go away and pout a little. Still, those romantic visions always led to excellent times, and though there really wasn't a leader in the Dracut Tigers, Jack often ended up organizing their activities, with just a touch of magic.

Late on Saturday night, for instance, they discovered the inebriated body of Luxy Smith, Pawtucketville's most distinguished drunk, and took it upon themselves to aid the old gent home. Accompanied by Jack's sepulchral commentary, they got him home and into bed and seemed to be doing fine

until, to a muttered chorus of invective, Luxy fell out of bed, landing gracelessly on his skull. Hastily stuffing him back in, the boys raced home down the hill, with Jack mournfully predicting their imminent arrest on "Moidah One, Gentlemen. Moidah One. We're all gonna FRY!" By the bottom of the hill, GJ had to smack Bobby Morrisette out of his panic, and every one of them breathed easier when the days passed and Luxy's grizzled visage failed to appear on the Sun's obituary page.

On the whole, they were good times. One summer the whole bunch climbed into Scotty Boldieu's ancient Chevy and drove to Vermont, where they flirted with sophisticated college women rocking away on the porches of a summer hotel. While lost on a country road on their way back, they had to scramble out when their car's brake began to smoke, leaving a sleeping Scotty in the back seat. GJ calmly reached in and yanked him out, but Jack's gleeful description made GJ into a hero worthy of great legend, "Plunging fearlessly through flame and smoke to save another life a day."[1]

Unfortunately, his soaring imagination could do little with Lowell High School. Bigoted and traditional, the Irish ran the school and Headmaster Sullivan was not a fount of experimentation or creativity. Jack excluded himself from the school's biggest social event, the spring Field Day. Competition was fierce for the Boy and Girl Officers who organized the yearly drill and gymnastics show on the South Common, but the

aspiring young author cared not at all for that sort of status. Sadly, Miss Mansfield had no worthy successor, and even English class was only a lazy blend of spitballs, notes, giggles, E. A. Robinson and Robert Frost; only the inspiration of Emily Dickinson justified his time there.

But Jack, as GJ would later say, made a religion out of whatever he was doing: Approaching literature with the intensity of a Dionysic satyr, the tepid worship of English class never satisfied him. So he stopped going to school and began to get an education, half a block away at the Lowell Public Library. Spellbound, he sat under the bust of Caesar and pored through the Harvard Classics, the 11th edition of the Encyclopedia Brittannica, H. G. Well's Outline of History, William Penn's Maxims, Hugo, and Goethe. More importantly, the young disciple discovered two masters to guide him in his quest; William Saroyan and Ernest Hemingway.

It was a time in which popular fiction--the short stories in the Saturday Evening Post, Colliers, or Liberty--was almost totally populated by people named Jones or Lewis, the sort of WASPs Jack hardly knew. Saroyan, the dark-eyed Armenian from Fresno, was living proof that someone who wasn't an "American" could be a successful writer. Following Aram's wild misadventures with his cousin Moorad and the white horse or the Indian and his Cadillac, Jack loved the funny tone and the poetic charm Saroyan gave his tales. Too,

Jack sensed in them--and argued ferociously with his father--the tragic depths below the chuckles, the dues paid by all of America's immigrants, their suffering; the price it took to be an American.

Beyond charm or even tragedy lay the High Priest, demon sorceror Hemingway. Clinging above the abyss of Nada, saved only by the pure and terrible act of writing one real sentence, and then yet another, Hemingway was a worthy master for a young pilgrim like Jack. For him, Jake Barnes and Robert Jordan were truly alone; paying no attention to the macho code later epitomized in the Gregory Peck-white hunter-bullfighter-professional image, Jack saw only "pearls of words on a white page giving you an exact picture," as he said later. In his ragingly committed seriousness, young Jack dirtied the purity of paper with Papa's somberness, if not yet his craft.

Shy and retiring except with his closest friends, he fed an interior flame of happy lunacy from many sources, but especially from the greatest image bank of them all--the movies. GJ was an usher at the Rialto, and escorted by the extra thrill of something for nothing, Jack and the gang slipped into the darkness slashed with the projector's white light and shared a fantasy life that replaced Lowell's flat poverty with riches beyond comparison. In their joyful devotion, Scotty's habit, a few years later, of going down at 10 A.M. to stare at Betty Grable's legs through six

showings of Down Argentina Way seemed quite normal. Eventually Jack would imagine himself with Gene Tierney, "a young beautiful American girl getting excited in your arms," perhaps on the luxurious set of Top Hat. Clark Gable was their god, smiling through mysterious doings in Shanghia, or leading his "brothers" to a world of freedom and decency far away from Captain Bligh and the Bounty. If they could not have the king, they accepted substitutes like Kane Richmond and Robert Lowery, the B-movie "poor man's Gables." Inside the Rialto, they were as suave as Nick Charles played by William Powell, who mixed wit and alcohol so perfectly in the Thin Man, so much the adult that even Queen Garbo would break her silence for them.

And there was laughter. Laurel and Hardy in the Foreign Legion left them gasping, but above all the verbal insanity of Groucho and Chico, "like a gang of surrealist kids in a perpetual fourth of July lighting firecrackers," ripped away at the pompous surety of adults in a world that seemed even then strangely out of kilter.

There were more kinds of love than Garbo's, more sorts of thrills than Gable; King Kong's tragic passion for Fay Wray crashed around their ears with the power of his thundering fall off the Empire State Building, and the immortal closing line, "'Twas beauty killed the beast," left them cheering more for the gorilla than the sleek assassin airplanes that did him in. Lost in the Rialto's perpetual

nightworld, they watched Jeckyll become Hyde, and then crossed the street to the Moosehead Cafe where Jack leapt the railing and became the tragilunatic Hyde himself. Brown wood harsh-lit cafes were part of both their worlds; the Moosehead Cafe could well have been a set stark enough for the scenes in Little Caesar or The Petrified Forest, where, as one critic later said, the "night diner [was] established as the stopping post for all the outriders of American society."[2]

Basil Rathbone was neither glamorous nor an outcast, but his perfect incarnation as Sherlock Holmes, the greatest fictional character of all time, inspired them none the less. Accompanied by Nigel Bruce, the slightly dense but bulldog loyal Dr. Watson, he swept through the fog with a brain so unlike any other man's that his exquisitely rational perceptions seemed nearly magical. A few years later Sherlock even became a propagandist for a Britain struggling against the Fascists, snapping Jack out of his trance and into a time where, as the decade slipped away, place names like Manchuria, the Sudaten, and Dunkirk became a daily reality.

And the years of growing up passed with talk; the serious talk of men on street corners mulling over the Red Sox' chances and Beacon Hill's machinations, or the crazy talk of boys contemplating the subtle secrets of girls, or the even more inscrutable mysteries of the future. But

Jack was painfully sensitive, aware that he was somehow different, too conscious of what he saw as the "buffoonery," the "brutality," the "carelessness of a savage rhapsodic America." Lost in the belief that he was the "only mortal soul in the town who [had] frighteningly understood the meaning of life and death," his true friends were not GJ and Roland, but Anna Karenina and Jean Valjean, Garbo, Byron and Tristan, Hedda Gabler. Ready to gouge fat chunks out of the flesh of life, Jack needed more sustenance than the submissive realism of the gang. He craved a soul-partner, an angel touched with Art's holy fire, another brother-saint.

And then, one day, he met a young man named Sebastian Sampas.

A quixotic child of fancy, Sammy was a gloomy-poetic, tearfully empathetic product of an enormous Greek home noisy with love and emotions and tears, sulks, tantrums, laughter and music. Sharing Gerard's idealism and Jacky's own sensitivity to guilt, he was, Jack thought, an "amazing gleeful figure different from anyone else in the businesslike town."

Hunched over a cup of coffee at the White Tower in Kearney Square, his delicate hands gesturing over the glories of Keats, Byron, and Rupert Brooke, Sammy filled the intellectal void that was Lowell. Their dreams swept them off Merrimack Street and around the world; Jack would be a great novelist, Sammy the poet supreme. They met in the spring

of 1938, and against a cancerous world, their love flowered with encouraging mutual support.

Not everyone was so enthused about Jack's new mate. Lowell's Greeks called dumb, mill-bound Canucks "gallis," and Sebastian made Roland nervous with his cultured voice, his educated, classy polish. When Jack wrote plays and Sammy acted them out, Fred thought they were both a little nuts. Tall and thin, paying no attention to his clothes or to conventional romance, some people thought Sammy queer, in both senses of the word. Oh, Sammy was a lover all right, but his models included Lenin as well as Casanova, and his heart reached out not merely to one person but to all of suffering humanity. Sweetly unconcerned with cynical disbelievers, he could break into tears at the brotherhood of man he detected in the eyes of a cripple, and his passionate romanticism demanded an end to injustice for all, required that he put his pen in the service of radical change. For him, glorious vacation August was defined in a work he called "Summertime in a Mill City," in which the noon heat wave swept through a factory, and

> Soon the red building
> Is an oven
> The workers,
> The French
> The Greeks
> The Poles
> Swear as they stand
> And pull the wet cloth
> From the vats of dye-- . . .

Captured by John Reed's vision of comradely equality in the first blooming of the Russian Revolution, Sam and Jack solemnly formed a radical study group to enlighten humanity, and called it Prometheus, after the Greek God who brought down fire. With a dozen others they read Das Kapital and the New Masses, argued the theory and reality of social change, and consecrated themselves to their task. Steeled by the pragmatic lessons of their working class origins, they ignored the U.S. Communist Party and paid no attention to dogma or faction. More seekers after "the light which passeth all understanding" than revolution, their quest flowed out of ethics and not economics, a surrogate for the God their teenage atheism had momentarily displaced.[3]

Jack never felt that vision with Sammy's all-consuming intensity, in part because he had another dream, a Kerouacian vanity of football success that would command his life for the next four years--and influence the direction of his path forever. Almost every American male shares the dream, if usually vicariously; the rhapsodic grace of perfect speed flashing down a green field, the quick over-the-shoulder glance that sights the blurred brown football spinning clearly out of the air and into your waiting hands, the slashing drive to the goal line, the moment of absolute glory as you stand quivering with excitement and the roar of the crowd rises up and sweeps you away. Jack--as he did with so many of his

vanities--drank that dream to the bottom, grabbed it all; and if the price was perhaps higher than he could afford, who can say he did not win in the end?

So intense is the dream, most boys hardly need reasons to play football, but Jack had several. Football was the golden lifeline out of the mills, the freedom tunnel to a campus with ivy-covered libraries and flirtatious sorority women. Too, athletics compensated for more than Leo's thin wallet; they replenished his tarnished ego. Papa's "pride thing" overflowed with a Star Son to brag on. Only it was Jacky who had to pay the price.

He went out for the team his sophomore year, and knew the special horror of being too small, too light, of being so tired the first day of practice that he could not reach the bus home, of walking back in a stupor and falling asleep at the supper table, his face resting limply in his plate. A small and gentle fourteen year old, he knew as well the lost feeling of being ignored by the Seniors as they serenely strutted through their own familiar world. Junior year he returned, stubborn and intense, pushing beyond exhaustion to run yet once more through a leg killing series of tires laid on the ground. They practiced in the summer, working in the steamy August heat that made it impossible to see or breath, their stomachs lurching and retching, every muscle in their body aching to stop. After a while September cooled things off, and they were in shape, and the

main problem was the rain that doubled the weight of their shoes with mud, trickled down their necks, made their now practiced hands clumsy all over again. The coaches circled and yelled, their whistles wailing mournfully at mistakes and erupting cheerfully at a tough block or good tackle. Jack never played that year, and ran out the cold dregs of the season like all scrubs, working hard to avoid getting his hands and feet stepped on in the dark freezing practices of November. Though he liked Coach Tom Keady, Jack was angered when the big boss rumbled, "Listen Kerouac, I'm sparing you for next year. Put on a little weight Kid, you're still fifteen, right?" Raging away as usual, Leo claimed the coaches had been bought, typical of "this gahdam shittown on the Merrimack. This is the Crummiest town anyway," he'd say, smashing his cigar into an ashtray. It never occurred to him where the poor Greek and Polish parents whose sons were starters might have gotten their bribes.

Uninfluenced by suspicion or desire, the seasons turned and Jack's time came; he was a Senior in the fall of 1938, and his name began to pop up occasionally in the Sun, placed somewhere among stories detailing Japanese atrocities in China, the struggle in Czechoslovakia, Lowell High Society's doings, and the news from Hollywood as reported by Charley Sampas, Sam's big brother. Kerouac didn't start the first few games, not because of corruption but because in that time of one-platoon football, he played poor

defense, and substitution was then uncommon.

Keady was a popular man in Lowell, the first successful coach in years for the "Red and Gray." Tough and old fashioned, a former coach at the Quantico Marine Base and Dartmouth, he swore like a trooper and bluntly--though fairly--chewed ass for mistakes. Goof a second time and his boys knew they would be running laps around the field until they did remember. Scrapping after victory with their parents' mill-enslaved hunger, the '38 team was a stereotypical depression-ethnic competitive gang; Lipka, Sorota and Voroski joined by Chiungas, Kulis and Zoukis, Coughlin, Dowling, and Sullivan. Art Coughlin was captain and quarterback, and Christy Zoukis was a flashy halfback, but the only real star was the team itself, whose single wing attack crunched through the opening of the season.

On September 17th, the Red and Gray beat Greenfield in front of the home town folks, and Jack experienced the exotic frustration of having two touchdowns nullified by penalties. He ran extremely well, picking up five of the team's seven first downs for an average 10 yards per try. The following Wednesday, the Sun rewarded him with a brief mention: "Kerouac has the legs and the style." Giddy with the reassuring joy of an opening win, the team traveled to Gardner in the midst of a hurricane then ripping away at New England, and won, just managing to stumble mediocrely by their hapless foe. All Jack got out of the game was two lonely

minutes of playing time late in the fourth quarter, twenty-five yards gained, and a painfully bloody nose.

It was obvious to everyone that coach was pissed, heads rolled, and Jack started the third game, at home against Worcester Classical. It was the sort of day that overshadowed the most colossal fantasy, beggared the richest dreams, fulfilled vanity to a thunderous perfection. Silhouetted against the crisp October sky, the center of attention for his parents, friends, and his town, Jack caught a punt on his own 36 yard line, shifted wide, broke a tackle, and snaked 64 yards through the bewildered Worcester team for a touchdown. Minutes later he went off tackle from the Worcester 24 yard line, cut to the sideline, and romped ecstatically for a second touchdown. Late in the fourth quarter, Coughlin handed him the ball for the seventh and last time, and he crashed invincibly on for his third score: though he played less than half the game, he rolled up 140 yards and led Lowell to a 43-0 victory.

His solemn, if a bit murky, picture adorned the Sun sports page that week, and as if to show he had earned jersey number 35, he was listed as the twelfth man for the October 8th game against Manchester. Keady had switched him to quarterback, and he carried only once, but Lowell ran up a 20-0 win, and that was satisfaction enough. Better still, he started the fifth game, against crosstown rival Keith Academy. He scored twice and had one touchdown called back, and found

himself leading an undefeated, untied, unscored-upon team, with his name in the sports page headlines of the Boston Herald: "Kerouac is the 12th man in the Lowell High School 11."

Luck turns down as well as up. Malden was tough, and they tied Lowell 0-0. Worse, Lynn Classical beat them 6-0, and among the seven fumbles committed by his backfield, Jack had dropped a pass that would have tied the game. Now he discovered what public humiliation is all about, what happens when you risk the stage, and fail. Traveling to New Britain, Connecticut, with most of the starters hobbling from the last two ferocious games, they lost again, 20-0. Gallant in still yet another debacle, Jack scored one touchdown and was the team's workhorse in a cold, muddy loss to Nashua, New Hampshire.

And then Lady Luck bent over and gave him a big fat kiss. For the archrival waits at the center of the competitive sacrament of football, and Thanksgiving is his day. It was the week of big games--Army-Navy, Harvard-Yale, Stanford-Berkeley--and for Lowell, it was the traditional season close against Lawrence, their bitter foe. Lowell could have lost nine games that fall, but so long as they outscored Lawrence, the season would be a complete success. A whole year of being teased or being able to tease was focused on that day, and turkey had to wait. November 24th, 1938, was a cold and miserable day,

and with just a few minutes left, Lowell led by the thin score of 2-0. It hurt to block and tackle on a day like that; bruised and shivering, the team sipped water and clustered around Quarterback Coughlin as he told them Keady's play, a pass. Lawrence could score at any time, and the Lowell fans shifted restlessly, praying for the clock to run out, for the tension to snap. Coughlin came up and over Chet Lipka, the center. He took the ball, dropped back, and flipped a wobbling pass towards Jack; a giant Lawrence defensive end reached out and ticked the ball so that it sailed wide, and there seemed no possible way that Jack could catch it. Flying down the field, Jack looked back, turned, stretched, plucked the ball out of the air just inches off the ground, spun around and sprinted; at the five yard line, two defenders came swarming up, but Jack dropped low and smashed into them. Then as in some wholly improbable dream, he found himself and his precious football inches over the goal line, and the referee's arms shot straight up. Touchdown. And the Lowell fans went crazy.

No matter that one of his team mates would sit cursing in the locker room because he hadn't scored, nor that Leo would carp and grumble about the quality of press coverage for his boy; for one golden, apocalyptic day, Jack Kerouac was a hero.[4]

Extract the essence of Lowell's life-blood, and you will find alcohol. 'Gansett, Metaxa, Jameson's Irish--the label does not matter; the water of life deadens the pain, gives working people strength to get out of bed and through the door to work, destroys them. Jack was old enough that winter to take up his liquid heritage in normal fashion. The barkeep at Moody Street's Silver Star Tavern cast a benevolent eye on underage drinkers, and charged only a nickel for an enormous glass of Pickwick Beer. Initiated into the brotherhood of booze, flushed, witty and profound--or so he thought--Jack weaved among the ancient barflies, tugging at their sleeves and urgently proclaiming, "Don't you know that you're God?"

Tongues and thoughts loosened by the foamy warmth of Pickwick, they laughed and argued and reminisced. "Remember the time, GJ?", Jack whooped. "We went into the Fox and Hounds Club in Boston, and asked that ritzy clerk to page Mr. Lamont Cranston, and he did!" Sitting in the Star, or down the block at the Pioneer Club, everyone was a Groucho, or even a Socrates. After a few rounds, they'd be stiff enough to ponder--briefly--the existence of God. GJ would snap that trance by thumping the table and yelling, "I think this is God, and as he fell off his stool in helpless laughter, Jack would cackle agreement.

But they preferred music to philosophy, and whatever the topic, their deliberations went on over the wailing back-

ground of Tommy Dorsey, Artie Shaw, and Benny Goodman; along with every member of their generation, they were the children of Swing. Cooking along one night in 1935 in Los Angeles' Palomar Ballroom, Benny Goodman and his band had stumbled onto some aural potion that drove his fans frantic, lifted them to their feet and sent American teenagers dancing into the aisles and towards the stage. By the time Goodman reached his next stop, Chicago's Congress Hotel, "Sing, Sing, Sing" was enough to twitch the feet of every high school student in the land. Carried along by the sheer velocity of the craze, the other white Swing bands emerged seeking mecca-the Paramount Theatre in New York--and radio shows of their own. Jack knew the band lineups and songs perfectly, studying the music as passionately as once he'd followed the Shadow. He and Fred would sit up all night and listen to the Milkman's Matinee from midnight to five a.m. on WHDH Boston, or Woody Herman's Friday night show, or Jimmy Dorsey and Artie Shaw on Saturday. They all went to Lowell's City Auditorium to hear Harry James, bought Metronome with the gravity of stockbrokers purchasing the Wall Street Journal, and disputed fine points with the subtlety of Foggy Bottom diplomats. Utterly captivated by white Swing's combination of sweet background and hot solos, Jack and his friends were as yet largely ignorant of the original creative source of the magic--black musicians like Fletcher Henderson, who wrote the charts that made Goodman a millionaire,

or the royal performers known as the Duke and the Count, who had developed the music that now enriched the white stars.

From the first blush of this life long love affair, Jack displayed a strong sense of discrimination, rejecting Tommy Dorsey as "too classical," digging the harder edged sound of Gene Krupa. He loved the drums, the keeper of time, and constantly played around with an old pair of sticks. But most of all, he liked to listen to music, spinning the records on a phonograph and yanking Roland's arm in his excitement, "Listen to this one!" Pounding his hands on the wall, he'd yell, "Oh listen to that man Suhwing, he knows, he knows, he's got that Beat!"

He was a young man, and that winter he discovered that the precious love of a woman was more glorious than football heroics, more captivating than the pulsing beat of the drums. Her name was Mary Carney, and she was a beautiful woman child, a year older than he, more adept, yet restless and uneasy within the narrow patterns her working class Irish life offered. A vision of lovely soft black hair and clear pale Celtic flesh, she wore a pure lace collar around her neck, a crucifix at her breast, and a haunting white flower above her ear. Jack had loved before, but this was the love that rages and trembles, explodes

inside and washes away everything you once were, exalts and grieves you at the same time. They met at the Rex Ballroom on New Year's Eve 1938, introduced by a mutual friend. More sophisticated than he, she took him by the hand and led the nervous opening conversation, maternally fussing with his tie and hair, asking him if he had a girlfriend. He was gauche enough to say yes, but his dates with Peggy Coffey that fall had been merely pleasant, and this was something altogether new.[5]

And so he spent the winter of 1939 seeking the gauzy sweet grail of romance, running from home in Pawtucketville to school to track practice to dinner to her home in South Lowell. They danced, went to the movies, shared ice cream and secrets. With the Concord River frozen they went ice skating, and Jack laced up her white skates, kissed her pink cheeks, and sipped hot chocolate in her family's kitchen, waiting for her mother and railroad-brakeman father to go to bed. Once alone, they seized each other in fearful joy, mouth clinging to mouth, holding kisses endlessly until their mouths cramped, the skin chapped and blistered, for they were too frightened to let go, unable to relax into their happiness. Then for Jack came the three mile walk home, his private smiles and quiet whoops of joy warming him against the midnight wind, imagining himself as an anonymous but ever-welcome explorer trudging through the snow.

Staggering out of his warm bed at seven, he'd dreamily

eat toast and oatmeal and head for classes. Foggy-eyed, he found Fred's house half-way between home and school an invaluable rest stop, and his classes frequently had to get along without him. By late afternoon, he'd be rested enough to trot over to the Armory for track practice, to purify and punish his body and make it worthy of the heroic canonization of the Sun sports page. The baggy red and gray sweatsuit might not seem so sleek, but once he laced up his tight light running sneakers, he was Hermes Tresmegistus, Mercury, a quicksilver graceful messenger flying over the board track. When he was solitarily crouched over the starting line, there was no Duke Chiungas or Chet Lipka to block for him, and fast as he was, he learned the truth of sprinting; that it was mental, not physical, the place where ideas "explode into fact, bang!", where mind and body had to flow with absolute unity. He ran so well that he was the team's leading scorer, and late in March he competed under the enormous roof of the Boston Garden, winning the state low hurdles championship.

Jack turned seventeen on March 12, 1939, and though Nin's husband Charlie Morriesette had slipped and revealed the secret, the surprise birthday party Nin and Mary threw for him was a very special night indeed. His girlfriend, his family, and his friends all plowed through a raging blizzard to Nin's house, gathering to celebrate his young manhood.

Handsome in his heavy letter sweater with the big "L" across the chest, Jack even had to pose with Memere, Leo, Mary, Roland and Nin for the Sun and Citizen-Leader photographers. A little dazed by the attention, he wandered from noisy conversations with GJ and Roland to whispered intimacy with Mary. A new baseball glove, an Emersonette portable radio, and a jacket and tie were the practical booty, but seeing the bottle point unerringly towards Mary in Spin-the-Bottle was even more pleasant, though he burned with jealousy pangs when Leo or one of his friends flirted with her.

Life should have been perfect then, but love had expanded him in all directions, gave him the power to suffer as well as be exalted. Jack and Mary were cursed with the human desire for Absolutes, now, and too many nights he trudged drearily homeward over the bridge savoring Memere's homily, "On essaye a s'y prendre, pi sa travaille pas--" (We try to manage, and it turns out shit). All that carried him through the gloom was the thought of a note from her at school next morning, and however short and unromantic--"You're so crazee"--the messages were, the tiny slips of paper intoxicated him more than than any gallon of the Silver Star's best. But Mary was jealous--of the glamorous Peggy Coffey, who was so good a singer that they had taken to calling her the White Billy (Holliday), of the track team that stole him away from the dance floor, of the ambition that was inevitably tearing him out of Lowell to college, of the fates.

She was no sunny laughing lassy, but an Irish woman cut with Spanish darkness, a shadow behind her eyes that gave them depth--and pain. He could not cope with "her rippling mysterious moods, philosophic, faintly bestial like the torture of skulls and breasts of cats," and his joy could swirl dizzily into fury, his tenderness transmuted into cruelty, and "I'd want to rip her mouth out and murder her," as he later wrote. The warmth of her full body pressed soft against him, the dizzying odor of sweat and perfume, were not enough. However much he desired her, his hands stayed on her back, away from her breasts, away from between her legs. Armored in her slip and girdle, Mary was a Good Girl, and Jack knew it, and he trapped himself in his frustrations, and he suffered.

Marriage was their only solution. But when he proposed, Mary knew that he was unready, wanted him to be older, for then "you'd know more what to do with me," and she refused him. Jack had no trade, no skills but in his feet and mind, no future yet in Lowell. It was a lovely fantasy he conjured up--he would come tiredly home from work on the railroad to a white-picket-fenced house by the tracks, sitting down on red kitchen chairs to dinner from her hands--but it was thin and insubstantial, and as the gray winter trees exploded into green that spring, he stepped back and reconsidered. Now Mary was ready to say "Yes," and suddenly honeymoons looked deathly, and the thought of losing home had him panting childlike in fear. Railroad work and

the white picket fence house seemed more like a prison than paradise, and he paid close attention when Memere lectured him about the value of a college degree. His mind danced and equivocated, unwilling to exchange the emotional security of Memere and Papa and home for the adult pleasures and risks of marriage. Exasperated with his ambivalence, Mary shifted her affections to a new young man, and by May, dates were difficult to get. His sorrow at losing her was cut with relief; at the time, he was looking at the offers of two men, Frank Leahy and Lou Little, which were even more attractive, though nearly as disturbing.[6]

Leahy was football coach at Boston College, and that glorious week after Thanksgiving he had offered Jack a scholarship. B.C. was a comfortable Jesuit school only 35 miles from Lowell, and besides, Joe Sullivan, Leo and Nin's boss at Sullivan Brothers Printing Company, was a school trustee; Leo argued loudly for the home squad. Unfortunately for Papa, during the previous season he had engineered events that would lead other ways. In between cheers for Jack at the Leominster game, Leo had met Elmer Rynne, a national tennis champ as a younger man, and still a well-known Lowell sportsman. Leo had importuned Rynne, "That's my boy out there. Why don't you be a good fellow and help him get into a school." Elmer was unimpressed until the next play, when Jack twisted loose for a touchdown. Then Elmer began making calls, and ended up with Lou Little, the football coach at Columbia Uni-

versity. Little was a star himself, and to Jack and his generation he was "the symbol of a man who breathed the very fire of immortality into one, a man who, as though with putty, molded All Americans."

Memere was enthralled at the thought of her son succeeding in the Big City, and torn between his parents, Jack talked with Sam's big brother Charley. Jack had decided that he could balance the demands of art and money with a career in journalism, and Charley had not only the credentials of a Sun columnist but Leo's respect, earned years before as co-workers on L'Etoile. Speaking to a prospective writer and fellow lover of Broadway, Charley had no trouble about rhapsodizing on the glories of Manhattan.

Not that it was ever really a contest. The grim job of disappointing his father was cause for many an orgy of self-punishment over the ensuing years; as Jack would tell the story, Leo lost his job on account of his decision. But it wasn't people like Charley or Leo or Gabrielle who convinced him that Manhattan was his future home, but images -- Edward G. Robinson waving his cigar around Chinatown, or Don Ameche strolling down Fifth Avenue, or Hedy Lamarr languishing in a suite at the Ritz. Quite simply, New York was the City.

Following his lost love and his athletic success, the last months of high school were a boring trial. With Mary gone, Jack turned to the gang, but that was beginning

to crumble; Scotty was working in an airplane base up the road, one tiny part of the ominous gale of disaster about to sweep the entire world. Before he could get to the sports page and enjoy the fact that the Sox had a superb rookie right fielder named Ted Williams to go with Foxx and Doerr, the front page headlines like "Hitler Defies World to Tear Reich Apart" drew him in, taught him about Moravia, Romania, and Memel on the Baltic. Regularly now, the front page of the Sun featured a map of Germany, a map whose shaded portions expanded and contracted with Hitler's success and failure, a map whose size grew until it seemed to dominate the page.

A strange time to be young and alive and growing . . . and a graduate from high school. On June 28, 1939, he and his 952 classmates sat in the City Auditorium, agonized through the High School Chorus' rendition of "The Farmer's Daughter" and "Little Polly Flinders," the class Salutatory "The American Way of Education," and struggled up to sing God Bless America. They sat back down to endure the Valedictory "Liberty" and the awarding of prizes (Jack received none), then swiftly grabbed their diplomas out of Mayor Archambault's hands and were gone.

Columbia had decided to hide Jack in Horace Mann Prep School for a year to give him a chance to gain weight and improve his scholarship from L.H.S. to Ivy League standards, and in September, he got on a New York bound bus.

As he pulled out of the depot, his head aching with a lifetime of memories, visions and dream thoughts, WPA workmen were tearing down the tenements at the heart of Lowell's Acre to build a modern housing project.[7]

C H A P T E R I I I

"PROUD CRUEL CITY"

> Proud, cruel, everchanging and ephermal city, to whom we came once when our hearts were high . . .
> "Eugene Gant"

A slow, lumpseated bus was a thoroughly incongrous way to enter the sleekest, fastest city on earth, but the contradiction served to emphasize the unbelievable size of New York, the center of the western world. Down the Boston Post Road--Rte. 1--it travelled, rolling through the outer towns like New Rochelle, past the "infinite pueblo" of Bronx apartment houses, tenements and streets endlessly looming up and dropping behind. Stunned, Jack realized that there were still more than 200 blocks to go to the Battery at the southern tip of the island. Finally the bus crossed a bridge, past black people crowding the sidewalks of Harlem from 155th St. on, down Columbus Avenue, until the bus swept out of the narrow tenement corridors at 110th St. and its passengers could look down the three magnificent miles of green Central Park flanked by the penthouses of Central Park West, the other end of the Park framing the skyscrapers that erupted in midtown Manhattan. The bus shifted to Ninth Avenue, and the endless stores and shoppers were like dozens of Kearney Squares end to end, finishing only in the furious rush of Broadway and many more people and lights and action. Yet the southern half of Manhattan still remained to be seen.

The Big Apple. Fiorello Laguardia was its Mayor, Tom Dewey its virtous District Attorney, and Walter Winchell its Prophet. Its sound was an exhilarating and nerve wracking blend of Popeye, Betty Boop, and Groucho; of the pushcart vendors who still filled the lower East Side, the squawking blind newsies who sold its seven daily newspapers, the bells of St. Patrick's Cathedral, and the Swing music that leaked out of the stage door at the Paramount Theater. Jack explored it as once he'd traipsed the Dracut Woods, roaming from Battery Park and the Bowery to the ice skating rink at Rockefeller Center, the Museum of Natural History and the Central Park Zoo, from the intimacy of Greenwich Village to Park Avenue's august splendor. In his heart, he was a hard drinking Spencer Tracy Reporter-Hero, with a white scarf, a top-coat, and a wife who looked like a movie star waiting for him beside an East Side penthouse fireplace. His actual address was in Brooklyn.

Staying with Memere's stepmother in Brooklyn, Jack's reality was lace doilies, stickball on the stoop, bead curtains, and the sound of Father Coughlin's rants on the radio. Not that he saw much of his new home; Horace Mann School was in the northern Bronx, over an hour away by subway, and he was up at 6:00 A.M. to catch the train at the Fulton Street IRT station. By 34th Street in Manhattan, he'd usually be able to sit down, doing his homework to the rhythm of the D train rails. Then he walked up an incredibly steep hill to the

school. Horace Mann was right out of "Tom Brown at Rugby," replete with ivy covered gray stone classroom buildings, a rose-covered headmaster's cottage and crisp green playing fields all set in a prosperous German neighborhood perched on a hill overlooking the enormous pastoral vision of Van Cortlandt Park. Once a laboratory for Columbia Teacher's College, the school retained enough of a connection to the University to fill out its largely Jewish and Irish upper-middle class student body with a few of Lou Little's choicest cuts of football flesh, and Jack was one of five such prospects.

On the evening of September 21, 1939, the night before classes began, Jack sat in Brooklyn making the first entry in his new journal. He was terrified. Lowell was one thing, but Horace Mann was the big leagues, and his self-confidence wavered. Unsure of his readiness for this elite new world, he was utterly certain of the tremendous pressures that Gabrielle and Leo's ambitions had created. When she'd visited the school in August, Memere had been so thrilled about her son's gigantic step upward that Jack felt absolved of all his old guilts about her expectations, had felt almost angelically pure, the way he'd been when he made his first confession. The specter of failure was so ugly as to be unthinkable, but . . . what if he failed?

So as he made his journal entry, near hysteria inflated his ambition into a pompous, rococo frenzy of writing.

Eschewing his typewriter for the traditional pen, he paid homage to Thackeray, Samuel Johnson, and Dickens, concluding with, "Stay! I am not suggesting that I be included in their fold . . . " In the hour or so between his return home and bed time, he planned to devote himself to Latin, mythology, Spanish, literature, history, and the musing of his eminent journal. He gave up those particular ambitions by September 25th. Literature and the intellectual realm would have to await practicality. His first problem was to make the football team.

The first weeks of practice were the purest hell. His legs worked fine, but his imagination made All-Americans of his teammates, assured himself of certain failure, of a shameful return to Lowell, of the collapse of dreams. Losing the opener to Blair did not help. But by the second game, against the Columbia Frosh, he had resurrected his confidence enough to overlook being knocked out; he scored a touchdown, and Lou Little's staff watched as Jack led Horace Mann to a 20-0 victory. After a dramatic upset of St. John's, 6-0, Leo came down for the Garden City game, and was rewarded with Jack's three touchdowns and a 27-0 Horace Mann sweep. In the flush of success, Jack was proud of himself and his funny Papa who visited the locker room and had all the guys on the team laughing so hard. They closed their season against Tome, and the Kerouacian wheel of fortune struck a second time. Late in the fourth quarter, with the score tied

0-0, Jack ran back a punt 72 yards for a touchdown, giving Horace Mann a 6-0 win and the unofficial New York City prep-school championship.[1]

School was school and all right in its way, particularly when he discovered that he was just as smart as all those rich kids. But the way he proved his intelligence was disturbing. He wrote English papers for his wealthier and lazier classmates at two dollars a throw--free to fellow out-of-town football team members. The money was nice and it was obvious that he was sharp, but the rich kids were always going to have an advantage on him, would always have the price of the easy way out; his uneasy frustration blossomed. And those lunches. Every time his tongue slowly worked the peanut butter down off the roof of his mouth, he looked across the table at the rich kids with their turkey sandwiches and expensive pastries and chocolate milk, and he knew that he didn't quite fit in. He liked Dick Sheresky and Eddie Gilbert, but his visits to elegant 5th Avenue thick rug apartments, his encounters with Negro butlers and silver spoons and <u>real</u> mahogany furniture were threatening, a little too rich. Going it alone was easier, and as fall wore on, the D train sometimes ran north from Times Square without him.

Times Square was exotically democratic and entertaining, but Jack approached it in a path straight from his childhood in the Royal Theater. French as it was, Lowell

could not offer movies from Paris the way Times Square did, and Jack slipped into the mid-town Apollo theater to watch the proletarian Jean Gabin in The Lower Depths, and Louis Jouvet in Bizarre, Bizarre, as well as Errol Flynn and Alice Faye. Blinking back into the sunshine, he'd munch a hot dog and stand watching the pulse of America go flowing by its heart center at Broadway and 42nd St. The beat was quickening, that fall of 1939; though the homeless no longer camped out three blocks from his vantage point in Bryant Park next to the Library, the economy had been flat and the birthrate dropping until the Nazis had swept over Poland in August. The American workers who boiled out of the subways and towards the lofts and offices knew--however cynically--that the tragedy of Europe implied an American prosperity now visible in the accelerated movement of the streets.

If all those respectable workers were Times Square's life blood, its nerves were the spooks who slid among them, the gaudy whores and dizzy junkies, the pimps, numbers runners and sleazy "others" who were the area's true residents. Jack didn't wolf down his lunch quite so quickly when a woman of the streets caught his eye, and one day that fall he bypassed his food entirely. Having written a few extra papers at school and skipped several lunches, he gathered his change together, took a number of deep breaths to quiet his nerves, and approached a redheaded lady on the street. He put down his money in one of the Times Square hooker hotels,

and lost his virginity on a fall day that would always be a pleasant memory.

Horace Mann had neither sleaze nor flash, but it did have wit, and though Jack was an innocent Massachusetts jock who couldn't keep up with the droll ribaldry of Sheresky, Gilbert, Morty Maxwell, and Henry Cru, he made a satisfactory audience. When Dick or Henry would screw their voices into a simpering British Veddy-good-RAHthuh accent, "like very high smotche smaz" as Jack would later describe it, Jack would get to laughing so hard at their silliness that he'd end up giggling on the floor. Wizards of the private lewd humor of horny boys, their characters "Duke Douche," "Wanda Wantit," and "Flogg Itt" needed only to whisper the "in" word "Flazm" for boffo yoks from their rustic friend. Cru, a mad-eyed giant with a fantastic laugh and a profitable sideline selling daggers to the younger boys in the toilet, was especially good at mixing an edge of insult into his humor. Goofing along, he would intone, "Kerouac is a victim, a VICtim of his own imaGHINAtion . . ."

Perhaps his mouth could not keep up with these nascent Park Avenue Grouchos, but his pen could, and that fall The Horace Mann Quarterly published his first story. "The Brothers" wasn't very good. Temporarily seduced by his surroundings, he had crafted a detective story that rang more of Henry James than the Shadow and was cursed with cliches--"millions of myriad stars swimming in my brain," "the stygian darkness."

Moreover, its closing Sherlockian plot explanation was shamelessly looted from the chronicles of Dr. John Watson. For an incipient Grantland Rice, his sports articles in the school paper that winter were also pretty clumsy. But his second story, "Une Veille de Noel," reflected a much subtler appreciation of self. He placed it in familiar surroundings--a bar at Christmas Eve--and the barkeep's hockey talk, the proudly foolish college students, and the grimly brooding main character Mike were all authentic, even if the visiting Angel smacked a little of O. Henry.[2]

When he returned home to Lowell for Thanksgiving, his triumph was complete. Memere was overjoyed with his friends, "such nice, well-bred boys," and even Mary, who had written him that fall, greeted him with happy kisses. By New Year's Eve she was even willing to "go all the way," but this time it was Jack who was reluctant; she may or may not have been a virgin, but she was no whore, and he wouldn't "sin" with a woman he still wanted to marry.

It was a strange and ugly winter, twisted and cruel and nervous, as if a bitter fog of impending disaster had infected the atmosphere. The newsreels flickered with ghostly white-clad Finns locked frozen in death embrace with dark, frost bitten Russians. At home the mood was sour, three of every four Americans cheering on Martin Dies'

HUAC as it joined with J. Edgar Hoover in harassing Jack's working class radical hero, Harry Bridges, as well as such important subversives as the Jehovah's Witnesses. Organized liberalism entered the new decade rabid, as the ACLU purged Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, while VanWyck Brooks, one of those who had voted against her, condemned modernist artists as "rattlesnakes." Nation and New Republic readers were cheering James Cagney on, out of his cowardice and into his grave in The Fighting Sixty-Ninth, and did not see fit to protest the unconstitutional Smith Act, which required alien registration, and which established political tests for citizenship.

In the first half of that year, 1940, six black citizens of the United States of America had been lynched.

Not all of Jack's friends were jokesters. Seymour Wyse was a bright English boy of esoteric interests, and he helped lead Jack from penthouses to basements, from the East 60s to 125th St. Together they wandered Harlem, past Father Divine's 15 Restaurants--"Chicken or Chops, 15¢"--and the churches he called "Heavens," the Mt. Olivet Baptist Church and all the hundreds of others, the record stores and beauty parlors, Jack developing his eye and tuning his ear; looking, listening. Seymour had an even more specific destination in mind for them, and one fantastic night, he and Jack approached the psychic City Hall of black New York

City--The Apollo Theater. High in the balcony, Jack heard a black musician--Jimmy Lunceford--live for the first time, and instantly sank deep into that maelstrom known as American race relations, and especially to the odd corner occupied by whites who at least verbally reject racism and become respectfully interested, sometimes obsessed, with American Negro culture.

Jack had been fanatically listening to music for years, but segregation applied to music as well as to lunch counters; few young whites had a chance to buy black records, for in those hard times, few enough records at all were being produced, and mostly they were by white Swing bands. In one Billboard Top Ten of that period, Bing Crosby had the only record not by a regulation big band. Glen Miller had three songs--including "Imagination"--and the Dorsey Brothers together matched him, with Kay Kyser and Charlie Barnett filling out the bottom of the chart. An archetypal patriotic mid-western businessman, Miller had constructed a formula mixing clarinets and saxophones for a sweet-smooth dancing sound that paid off royally, though it was as superficially slick and stylized as it was popular.

The record companies were only one aspect of a business consumed in racism. Cafe Society, the first integrated night club in America, had opened in Greenwich Village only a year before, in December of 1938. That same year, the Benny Goodman Band had stunned the jazz world with a Car-

negie Hall concert featuring Johnny Hodges and others from the Duke Ellington group, and Lester Young, the Count himself, and more from the Count Basie Band. Artie Shaw had hired Billie Holiday as a singer and Goodman featured Teddy Hill and Lionel Hampton, but basically the jazz world was as Jim Crow as Tupelo, Mississippi.[3]

Inescapably, digging into the lore of jazz implied a confrontation with the "race problem." George Avakian was a jazz critic and a Horace Mann graduate whose brother was a classmate of Jack's. Armed with those connections and a press card, Jack managed to interview Avakian in a Village night club called Nick's. He learned a lot that night, and one of the first things was that Avakian couldn't select one All-Star Band; there had to be two--one white, one black. Black Baby Dodds had to be matched by white Dave Tough on drums, Louis Armstrong by Muggsy Spanier on trumpet, Freddy Green by Eddie Condon on guitar. Avakian rejected white Swing as vehemently as any black artist, but his real interest was in the old time gutbucket "Dixieland" jazz played by a group of whites from Chicago nicknamed the "Austin High Gang." Dixie was then out of favor, and only Nick's continued to give the likes of white Dixie stylists Muggsy Spanier and Bud Freeman a place to play. Records of that style were hard to fine, and Jack was immensely pleased--and said so in a school newspaper article--when George Avakian produced the "Decca Chicago Style Album," featuring Eddie Condon, Pee

Wee Russell, and the other veterans of white Dixie. Jack was becoming consciously part of the jazz cult, a little snotty and superior towards jitterbugging Harry James fans. In a word, he was Hip.

So in his review of the Decca Chicago album, he wrote that "most of today's swing is a sensationalized carbon-copy of jazz! It lacks both purity and sincerity." Listening to Austin High took him back to the black creators, Kid Ory and Louis Armstrong, and then back again to what Avakian had told him: "[Duke] Ellington stands alone." His ears raided Fletcher Henderson's black band, perhaps the best of them all in the early '30s, and came away with the sounds of Roy Eldridge on trumpet, Coleman Hawkins on tenor, and later Chu Berry on tenor. With these new black heroes, Glenn Miller's music seemed pretty flabby, although when Jack got a chance to talk to the most popular musician in America, he grabbed it. After all, nothing could be more worldly than ignoring the lines of the waiting crowd in front and slipping into the Paramount through the stage door, then into the Star's own dressing room. The article Jack wrote on the interview was a straightforward account of their conversation about fame, though there was perhaps a touch of acid in his description of Glenn as "clean-cut," after being so shocked at hearing him yell "Shit" at one of his employees.

Actually, clean-cut shit was about what he thought of

"Moonlight Serenade" and the rest of the most popular Swing. With the guidance of Seymour Wyse, Jack had evolved an understanding of "real Jazz" that was profoundly not concerned with dancing and entertainment values. For him, it was rather "music which has not been prearranged--free-for-all ad lib. It is the outburst of passionate musicians, who pour all their energy into their instruments in the quest for soulful expression and super-improvisation." When he came to write about the best band in the land, Jack's taste unerringly passed over the more popular Miller and Goodman and Harry James groups, and led him to select the black Count Basie Band. Time proved him right; he said that "Count Basie's swing arrangements are not blaring, but they contain more drive, more power, and more thrill than the loudest gang of corn artists can acquire by blowing their horns apart." In fact, Basie's arrangements were not written but played by ear, instinct, and long experience, giving this very large band the intimacy of a quartet. If any part of a jazz band had extra importance, it was the rhythm section, and the Count had the best in the world; Basie's own percussive piano, Jo Jones, "the most finished drummer in existence," Walter Page on bass, and Freddy Green on guitar. The Count's soloists--Dickie Wells on trombone, Buck Clayton and Harry Edison on trumpet--were all superb, but it was Lester Young who added the last touch of genius. Billie Holiday had tagged Young

as "Prez"; "We've already got a Duke and a Count," she said, and besides the most important cat in America is the Prez anyway." He was not only a surpassingly gifted performer, but a radical innovator whose tenor style would tremendously alter the course of Afro-American music. Jack's former model on the saxophone, Coleman "Bean" Hawkins, used a huge fat tone and a fairly ornate style to compete with the Swing era's shrieking brass. With all of Basie's band swinging fine behind him, Prez was able to stand for his solos with a tighter, more laconic, yet more expressive sound. Moody and introspective, Prez' horn cut deep, back to the roots, back to the source and soul of Jazz. He played the blues.

"The blues is a thing," said W. C. Handy, "deeper than what you'd call a mood today." It is the freedom sound, the call of those displaced from Mother Africa, the cry of the people who can't go home again. It is classic, universal, for its hypnotic repetition takes one, like a chanted Indian mantra, into the body, into the belly and lungs, the breath of life itself. The Blues come not from paper and notes, but from pure sound, the sound of the human voice, choked with tears or ripped by rage, but always the voice. It is truth. "Blues truth," as a critic later wrote, "runs counter to hysterical confidence in progress, machines, and human power. It is a darker, more fateful, though ultimately more relaxed and humorous truth that has its own sober and sensual comfort." As Memphis Slim once remarked, when it all comes down, "you

gotta go back to Mother Earth."

Blues truth seized Jack, ripped him irrevocably out of the white world, made him companion to Ishmael and Huck Finn, thrust him into the twilight land between the races. Displaced from Lowell by desire, from Horace Mann by his roots, he drank from the art source of the blues that didn't entirely fit into America either. Afro-American music wasn't entirely related to what Bach and Beethoven had to say; Bessie Smith was only the greatest of the musicians who discovered the uncharted areas between European notions of pitch, and jazz further liberated singers from the symphonic ideas of precise pitch and rhythm towards the more natural pace and melody of human speech. The blues made Jack colored, if not black, gave identity to a sensual-mystic 18 year old whose commitment to art was as nebulously defined as it was serious. The sound, the beat, and the rhythm of the human voice and experience would obsess him always.[4]

Spring came, but this year it was dreadful; the buds burst out on the trees, and so did the shrapnel of the on-rushing Wehrmacht which so easily conquered Norway and Denmark in April. Americans shivered and tried to escape this new and awful reality with a return to old pastimes. The World's Fair reopened for its second season totally altered;

gone was 1939's faith and confidence in progress as symbolized by the Perisphere, an enormous steel globe representing the infinite, and the finite 700 foot pillar called the Trylon. The monument to 20th century technology had reverted to a folksy County Fair, though even that was no real escape; nervous visitors demanded that war news be piped over the loudspeaker system.

Jack reached back as well, tried to fuse Lowelltown with the City, and invited Mary Carney to the Spring Formal. It was a disaster. Eddie Gilbert and Morty Maxwell imported dates from the likes of Miss Power's Finishing School; Mary came on a free railroad pass courtesy of her father. She stayed at one of Jack's friend's home, and the other guests immediately smelled out her Woolworth's perfume, saw her home permanent, heard her Lowell accent, and snubbed her. All the glories of a swank weekend in New York City--a visit to the Fair, hearing Frank Sinatra with Harry James at Carnegie Hall, sipping creme de menthe at the Plaza Hotel--merely accentuated her miserable lostness. Driven apart by social fears, they ignored the fact that Jack's white tie and tails were a gift, and that he went to the dance red-faced from his naive use of a sunlamp; he was at least partly a citizen of Manhattan, and by the end of the evening, Mary was crying, begging him to come back to Lowell with her. "No" was all he could say.

New York City was his firmly adopted environment, and thanks to his literary and athletic achievements, he had

become reasonably comfortable for a newcomer to the hermetic world of Horace Mann. The yearbook said of him, "Brains and brawn found a happy combination in Jack." Graduation came, and once again he only partly included himself. Without the money for a white suit, he lay reading on the grass behind the gymnasium, and escaped the torturous Commencement addresses that told the class, "You must remember that you were born at a fortunate time. You can always remember the world as it was before 1940." Only days before, on June 4th, the last battered ship had pulled out of Dunkirk, fleeing the horror of dive bombers and tanks, the invincible power of the blitzkrieg. Sticking a leaf of grass in his mouth, Jack paged through Walt Whitman until the talk was over, came out and shook his teacher and headmaster's hands, and walked back down the hill for the train ride home to Lowell.

It had come along at the perfect time in his life, that deceptively simple book Leaves of Grass; all that summer Jack and Sammy walked beside Walt, listening to his "barbaric yawp," to the crashing thunder of his prophecy.* Jack also read Thoreau and Thomas Hardy and Emily Dickinson, and even had a fling with Jack London. The Nietzchean beast raked over his dreams, made him literally hear "The Call of the Wild,"

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*Prophecy is used throughout this work not as prediction, but in the visionary sense of truth telling.

taught him of the free ones, the hobos, the bums, left him with a vision of freedom--and the open road. London gave him a taste for high adventure, and his romantic vision spewed forth ever more colorfully as a result. But it was Whitman, a creature of the cosmos, who truly fed Jack's dreams, who inspired him with the rapturous music of words.

In a country that was reading about "Plans" for a Nazi invasion of the United States, Jack listened to the prophet of a roughnecked, reverent, free America. Perhaps at the last possible time, everything about Walt's swirling faith fit Jack's young life. For the young proto-philosopher who wandered meditating by the river, Walt saw eternity in a leaf of grass as well as a star, and felt that

> Each is not for its own sake,
> I say the whole earth and all the stars in the sky
> are for religion's sake.

The water's babble became the sound of the cosmos to Jack as he pondered the meaning of life, death, rebirth. He killed a moth and lay it on his desk, lamented it and elegized it, saw the easy snuffing out of its life as a key to understanding Eternity. There was no smile on his face when Sammy turned to him one day that summer and said, "Don't think me insane, but I know, I <u>know</u> that I shall die young." Serious and also passionate, they read intently as Walt informed that wisdom is not a product of schools, but that "Wisdom is of the soul, is not susceptible of proof, is its

own proof." But Walt was far more than a metaphysician to them; he was an American, a man. Whitman was the bard who sang for the soul of a great country, who exalted the common working people--Jack's people--who would not exclude a prostitute, who howled of righteous freedom. A fiercely patriotic hyphenated American, Jack nodded when Walt said "These States are the amplest poem," and took it personally, learned, when he read, "Who are you indeed who would talk or sing to America? / Have you studied out the land, its idioms and men?" In the pause before the war, as he listened to the sounds of human Lowell voices, the town was never more alive to Jack, might well have seemed the source for Walt's cosmically democratic thought, "A great city is that which has the greatest men and women." The political impulses of the Prometheans had not entirely faded; along with the great poet, Jack and Sammy felt an excrutiating empathy with the downtrodden, and they shared his desire to see America become the center of a "superb friendship" among us all. Jack and Sammy were illuminated, graced with a sunny vision of the plain dressed common citizens of America--Boston Irish dockworkers, Alabama tenant farmers, Texans, New Yorkers--standing healthy, beautiful, and grand in their liberty.[5]

As friends on their way to the World's Fair drove Jack to his freshman year at Columbia, freedom was on almost every American's mind. The entire country had erupted into a red-white-and-blue frenzy of flags set to the sound of Kate

Smith's "God Bless America." Every flat blank space in the city, from walls to the sides of subway cars, was plastered with posters demanding that Jack "Help Holland," "Aid Norway," or contribute to the "Paderewski Fund for Polish Relief" and "Bundles for Britain." As Jack stood gaping by the sundial at the peacefully classical center of the Columbia campus, the names Goethe, Herodotus, and Plato he saw etched on the library frieze might have implied to him that Morningside Heights was a sanctuary, but Columbia President Nicholas Murray Butler, one of the leading members of the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies, made sure that it wasn't so. Whatever illusions Jack had nurtured about the tranquil scholastic dignity of college must have vanished at least by the time he began washing dishes at the student union for his room and board.

He arrived at Hartley Dormitory on September 17th, and was immediately disappointed with a room that overlooked noisy, smelly Amsterdam Avenue and came equipped with an obnoxious roommate complete with glasses and a beanie. A quick move to Livingston Hall and a room set on the interior courtyard eliminated the roomate, but he had to wear the blue and white beanie like the rest of his 500 classmates, or suffer the hazing of the worldly sophomores, as Columbia tradition demanded.

They passed through the various placement examinations, bought the "Blue-Book," the guide to campus life, paid their

$3.50 dues to the Student Association, and listened to President Butler's homily, replete with a line from Longfellow, about "The Joy of Work." Unlike the panic of the previous year, Jack found football practice routine, down to the fact that once again he didn't appear to be a starter. Academically, though, things were interesting. Science, in the form of Chemistry, was alien to him as usual, a confusing babble about specific density and molals, but Professor Mark Van Doren's Shakespeare class had the magic of gnostic illumination Jack had shared with Sammy, and the man's profound ruminations on the Bard sent Jack's mind flying out the window, over the pigeon shit on the sill, into the freer reaches of contemplation and musing.

By eight o'clock in the evening he would be seated at his desk, fiddling with his collegiate pipe, the radio tuned to the classical music on WZXR, burrowing into the ponderous literature Columbia offered first year students in those days--Aeschylus, Plato, John Stuart Mill, and of course Homer. In the golden lamp light of freshman year, he settled into the University, put on coat and tie and visited a suitably ancient and fusty Dean for dinner and a look at the old gentleman's dinosaur egg. Jack even joined a fraternity. Kerouac was part of the elite fifth of his class who did so--one of his fellow pledges at Phi Gamma Delta was named Courtney Rockefeller--but he didn't last. Years later he said it was because he wouldn't wear a

beanie, though money and breeding might also have entered into his decision to quit.

But 116th St. and Broadway was not really a good environment for an idealistic scholar-athlete that year; President Butler wanted patriots. In cooperation with the National Defense Research Committee headed by Harvard President James Conant, Butler had enrolled the "Blue and White's" men of science in the war effort, and established a Military Engineering Course, a Civil Aeronatucis Administration Unit, and a Marine Corps ROTC unit on campus. No one objected aloud to all this until Butler told the campus newspaper the Spectator that "those in conflict with the University's goals [which meant Butler's pro war views] should resign." Then the faculty growled. Backstage verbal pressure from heavyweights like Franz Boas, Wesley Mitchell, and Robert Lynd forced the President to back down, but the affair insured community division and bitterness.[6]

Jack was not exempt from the oncoming war. On October 16, 1940, classes at Columbia were suspended for the day, and Jack joined his out-of-town classmates in registering for the nation's first "peacetime draft." He couldn't listen to WQXR all the time, either. Since August, WCBS had been broadcasting a voice like death belonging to a human cloud of cigarette smoke named Edward R. Murrow, each show beginning with the fateful words, "This . . . is London." The newstand across the street from Livingston Hall

was saturated with aerial pictures of London pimpled with puffs of smoke and orange erupting fire. The gallant "Cloud Cavalry"--the R.A.F.--was fighting the Battle of Britain. In American minds, all Britons were involved in the war, from the Trafalgar Square flower vendor warming her hands at an incendiary bomb to the old man lighting a cigarette from it. One popular poster depicted a skull, one eye of which was an American flag, with the caption, "Defend America by Aiding Britain." After all, England was as real as Shakespeare to Jack, as personal as his good friend from London, Seymour Wyse, and war death had become integral to life.

It wasn't all serious, of course. Columbia was still a college in an age when the sorority of one school regulated the skirt lengths of campus flirts and paddled offenders, and coeds at another university taught their sisters not to smoke if their date didn't, since it would make him feel ineffectual. War or no war, life went on; on October 16th, after Jack registered for the draft, he got on the subway as usual to go to football practice.

The Columbia frosh had lost 18-7 to Rutgers on the previous Saturday, and while Jack had only gotten into the second half, the Spectator said that the team had a "fairly good running attack at times with Jack Kerouac showing up well." He started the second game, against St. Benedict's Prep, and ran the opening kickoff back 90

yards, but couldn't quite score. He was flying, looking great, but three plays later he planted his foot one way, his leg went the other, and he felt the terrible grinding pop of a broken leg. Far worse, Coach Furey didn't believe it was serious, called him a softy. "Run it off," he grunted, "it's just a sprain." Jack limped around for ten days, cursing the coach and his luck, before the X-Ray revealed the break and he swapped his uniform for a pair of crutches and clippings in the Spectator that called him a "star back," a "fleetfooted backfield ace," and mourned his loss to the team in a headline article.

A noble wounded hero, dragging himself about campus on his crutches, Jack spent the rest of the fall sitting near the fireplace of the Columbia student hangout the Lion's Den, eating filet mignon and hot fudge sundaes. Injury had its compensations; if he could no longer be a gridiron star, he now had time to think and relax, catch a movie or have a beer at the West End Cafe, another favorite student spot. His class attendance continued to be erratic, and by the end of the year he had gotten an A from Van Doren and flunked chemistry. But he was more interested in Alchemistry than its sordid modern successor, and for that he went beyond the laboratory to the American Faust, Thomas Wolfe, whom he started reading in the Lion's Den.

His leg propped on a pillow, he began with Look Homeward, Angel, and rapidly devoured the entire canon. For Jack,

the reading must have seemed eerie, almost dangerous at first, for Eugene Gant's young life in Look Homeward, Angel read like a precis before the fact of Jack's own. Here was a sensual loner, a "stranger who had come to life, fed by the lost communications of eternity, his own ghost, haunter of his own house, lonely to himself and the world. O lost." Saddled with a ravenously ambitious mother, a wailing, gloomy father, a dead younger brother, and the ignorance of their home towns, Eugene and Jack were fellow wanderers of the nether parts of the American experience. Both were cursed with guilty religious upbringings that distorted their natural sensuality, both had been blessed with a school teacher who had set them on the track of letters, and both were permanent inhabitants of the land of fantasy, though an Oz rather than a Lilliputia, for they were American dreamers.

As Wolfe wrote of Gant, "he was not a child when he reflected, but when he dreamt . . . he belonged with the Mythmakers." Jack drew back from Eugene Gant and looked at Thomas Wolfe, saw that he had written his book in utterly naked beauty, and felt that reading Wolfe was "a torrent of American heaven and hell that opened my eyes to America as a subject in itself." In Whitman's footsteps, Wolfe had sought to craft an epic of America, of his own gargantuan consciousness colliding with the nation and its people, its

sights, sounds, smells, and geography. Penultimately the book was a rush of sound, the surreal noise of blended American accents and idiom, the sound of the voice, or perhaps the magic sound of perfect poetic beauty:

> Deep womb, dark flower. The Hidden. The secret fruit, heart-red, fed by rich Indian blood. Womb night brooding darkness flowering secretly into life.

Like Lester Young, Wolfe taught Jack to listen; like Whitman, he gave Jack America as a subject. There were other lessons, though it would be years before they took root. By the time Jack read Wolfe, he had already written nearly a million words of prose, and was committed to the idea of stylistic craft. Though he would have nodded at the idea that Wolfe's work was nothing but confession, he followed his master's style literally rather than dig down to make his own confession. Secondly, Wolfe made him want to move, to see Asheville--and Fresno San Francisco Nome Dallas Cheyenne Denver and all the rest. That would merely have to wait for a while.[7]

Once his leg healed, Jack resumed his New York wanderings, especially when Sammy Sampas would visit him. Together they'd drink beer in waterfront bars, walk along the docks and warehouses, hold vigil on Brooklyn Bridge, go to museums and theaters, or scream poetry at dawn to the Statue of Liberty from the deck of the Staten Island Ferry. They grew close in those brief visits, and Jack was glad to

rejoin him for the summer. Though he'd flunked Chemistry and would have to make it up, he deserved to feel satisfied with his first year in college. Spring football practice had drawn several favorable comments from Lou Little to the Spectator about Jack's bright future, and since many juniors and seniors were leaving to join the military, his chances of playing--and being a star--were good.

The summer of 1941 should have been just like its predecessor, but little differences subtly combined to make it unusual. Jack still played baseball and swam and guzzled beer with the gang, but now GJ was away in the Civilian Conservation Corps, and another old friend, Billy Chandler, was in the Army. Even their old haunts on Moody Street had bent to the winds of war; the old black clad Greek ladies of the Acre were now hard to see for the dozens of prostitutes who worked the trade from nearby Fort Devens, which had increased enormously in size. Even the music on the radio had changed, and the hit tune of the season was not by Glen Miller or Harry James, but Beethoven. No one knew who had first taken the opening four notes from the Fifth Symphony to go with the morse code ..._ "V," though a BBC announcer called it "fate knocking on Hitler's door." But "V" became the common symbol of the allies, and though two-thirds of America--especially college students--wanted to stay out, their sympathies were clearly with England.

Jack and Sammy spent time in Lowell, of course, reading Wolfe now rather than Whitman, literally in tears over Gant's artistic agonies. They even got drunk together, or pretended to, and went over to Sam's brother Charley's house to harass the newly wedded couple late one night. Just as often, though, they'd cut out of town and hitchhike to Boston, where Sammy made anti-Fascist, Marxist-Leninist speeches on the Common. His audiences were now more respectful, because Communism--as equated with the Soviet Union--had been refurbished by Hitler's recent attack on Russia on June 22, 1941. Now they were England's allies. As the seemingly invincible Wehrmacht drove towards Moscow, Americans pondered their future. All that spring their eyes had been on the Battle of the Atlantic, and on the mushrooming might of America's own developing war machine. Everyone began to be involved, from baseball star Hank Greenberg, drafted in May, to Walt Disney, whose studio designed military insignia. In August, Life readers even saw their first pictures of American troops practicing a beachhead assault.

The harbingers of war were everywhere that summer, thick enough to infect Jack even in happy moments. After years of itineracy, Leo had gotten a steady job, and in August 1941 the Kerouacs moved to New Haven, Connecticut. Jack was empty and nervous as he felt his roots being ripped out of the ground, something like the way he felt as a boy

seeing Lowell threatened by the flood. But now it was he who would endure the changes, and without Lowell, he didn't know who he was anymore. Sitting on the front porch as Memere and a cousin packed, he stared up at the stars and entered the security of vanity, the comfort of a fantasy world. He imagined himself triumphantly leading Columbia to the Rose Bowl, scoring an A in chemistry, running a four minute mile, hitting uncountable home runs for the baseball team and turning down a Yankee contract, writing the greatest play Broadway ever saw, stunning Madison Avenue with a perfect book, knocking out Joe Louis at the Garden for the championship of the world.

Crazy dreams, and he knew it, but real nonetheless. As Nathanial Hawthorne once said, "if his innermost heart could have been laid open, there would have been discovered that dream of undying fame; which, dream as it is, is more powerful than a thousand realities." In any case, he decided that it was either him or the world of World War II that was nuts, and he figured that it was the world. Perhaps he was correct.

He returned to Columbia in the fall of 1941, but studying and practicing had no meaning in an apocalyptic world; his senses had been obscured by the pollution of war, and by the weakness Leo had shown as Jack had left the cottage in New Haven for school, pleading with Jack to save the "family honor," be a good boy and get ahead.

Football practice, pipe smoking and banter all seemed trivial in such a perversely deranged life. Besides, it didn't look as if he'd ever make the starting football team, anyway.

FDR was on the radio that September 11th, and he was declaring naval war on Germany. Responding to an attack on the U.S.S. Greer, he compared the Nazis to pirates and rattlesnakes and told America that henceforth German ships in American defensive zone waters would be shot on sight. At Columbia, Jack couldn't take the absurdity of it all anymore. "I was getting very poetic by that time," he recalled later. "And I'd get black and broody and everything. Packed my suitcase and walked right out in front of Lou Little. He said, 'Where you going?' I said, 'Oh, this suitcase is empty. I'm going to my grandmother's house to get some clothes.' I walked out with a full suitcase."

He took his suitcase and got on a bus for the south, Thomas Wolfe's south, and was gone. On September 26th, the New York Times printed an announcement that "Jack Kerouac, Sophomore wingback, will not be available this fall."[8] It took great courage to leave Columbia and hurt his parents the way he did, to burn down his whole athletic career. Sunk in confusion, Jack had little idea of what or why intellectually. But his intuition was sure; wherever his future lay, it was more likely to come with diesel smoke and a lonely bus seat on the road than gymnasiums, dormitories, and the cheers of the multitude.

C H A P T E R IV

MYSHKIN AT SEA

> But if I'm not the same, the next question is, who in the world am I? Ah, that's the great puzzle!
>
> "Alice"

> Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward.
>
> Job

And so he wandered, "joyed like a maniac" to Washington D.C., slept in a hot and buggy room, returned to New Haven, got a job in a rubber plant and quit at noon of the first day, sat and watched children at play and thought of himself as a "sad young man like Saroyan." Leo was disgusted, growling at Jack, "Here we whack along in the same pickle as ever. Why don't you people ever do right?" An old Lowell buddy got Jack a job as a grease monkey in Hartford, Connecticut; his rented room there was shabby enough, but it was his own--he was independent at last. Nights after work, he labored at a collection of short stories called "Atop an Underwood," imitating Saroyan, Hemingway, and Wolfe, serious and true. It was a melancholy autumn, as American red and blue Armies maneuvered in Louisiana, and the U.S.S. Kearney was sunk near Iceland. The new movie of the fall was Errol Flynn's preposterous paen to Custer and the 7th Cavalry, They Died With Their Boots On. Thanksgiving 1941 would have been thoroughly lonesome, but

Sammy knocked on his door that morning, and his presence made their blue plate turkey specials at the local lunch cart quite tolerable. They shared their writing and their affection, and Sammy urged him to return to Lowell and work on the Sun; two weeks later, when Leo wrote that he and Memere were going Home, Jack was only too pleased to follow them to Crawford St. in Pawtucketville.

Home it was, even if he was a failure and not a returning hero, even if the red brick looked rather excreable compared to Manhattan glitter. The Sun listed track meets he'd not compete in, mentioned that Hank Mazur--who had tormented Jack his sophomore year in high school-- was now Captain of the West Point football team, and more seriously, shouted one Saturday that "JAP Press Warns U.S. to Shun Far East / Billion Asiatics Ready to Fight." At least the movies were good; the Maltese Falcon was at the Merrimack, but Sunday he chose Citizen Kane at the Royal. He was astounded by it, by Welles' poetry in film, the fantastic chilling castle dissolving into the lightning flashes of "News on the March"; one day, he vowed, he'd write that way. Jack was fascinated with the epic American story of Hearst, the man who "served" the working class but was ultimately obsessed with self, the creative genius who ended consumed in a closing pall of black smoke. Kerouac lunged into the cold streets ready to run home and try his hand at script writing, and learned that 10,000 miles away the

Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor; his weird glooms of anticipation had been replaced with the flat certainty of War.

At first he planned to enter the Navy V-2 program to train as a flier, and while he waited for his application to be processed he put on a tie and got a job writing sports for the Sun. By noon he'd have his copy filed, and his editor Frank Moran would watch him speed-write his own story, stream-of-consciousness style, about Lowell rather than his model Joyce's Dublin, which he called "Vanity of Duluoz." His days were full, working out at the Y after work, studying H. G. Wells after dinner, talking with Sammy. His old lady friend Peggy Coffey was around, and occasionally the two would meet in the afternoon at his parent's house. With Leo and Gabrielle off to work, they enjoyed the privacy horizontally. Aged by the war, their high school morals had long since vanished. The grim strangeness of war was too real, too depressing, from the barbed wire hastily thrown into place on California beaches to the sickening diagrams in Life that told him "How to Tell Japs from the Chinese." A hundred miles east of Lowell German submarine packs preyed on American merchant ships, and Fortress America was nervous. With U.S. troops as yet uninvolved in fighting, the focus was on the war machine and its component workers--Willow Run in Michigan, the Brooklyn

Navy Yard where 35,000 men worked 24 hours seven days a week and where pictures of a rat with a swastika captioned "Starve Him with Silence" stared out at the laborers.[1]

For Jack, the real war was between himself and Leo. Enraged by his own failures, jealous of Jack's potential and worried over his son's present stagnation in Lowell "Shittown," the elder Kerouac yelled and carried on and asked him, "Do you think you can do what you feel like all your life?" With a young man's faith, Jack answered "Yes." Career and financial achievement were not important to him; ultimately, even the war itself was insignificant. Years later he said of himself at this time, "Mighty world events meant virtually nothing to him, they were not real enough, and he was certain that his wonderful joyous visions of super spiritual existence and great poetry were realer than all." Inside a nation rapidly transforming itself into a superb war machine, Jack stepped over the intellectual edge, lost himself in "visions of super spiritual existence," went to the library and checked out three volumes, and entered a mystic world occupied by Goethe's Faust, Job, and--above all else--Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky.

It was not an escape into some simple minded refuge, but a confrontation with reality that was as bitterly fright-

ening as the headlines. Faust's desire for absolute experience and expression was obviously resonant to Jack as a young artist, but the terror embodied in Marlowe's play was absent in Goethe. In the German version, Faust did not sell his soul to Mephistopheles, but wagered it; should he ever discover an experience so profound that he would cry out for it to endure forever, he would die. Goethe's Faust ultimately beat the devil by making such a demand not for an egotistical self, but for human creativity, so that when Mephistopheles called in his bargain, Faust was saved by divine intervention. It was another wager that forced Jack to peer into the abyss, for the Book of Job was not merely a tale for the faithful, but a mind trap. Satan told God that Job, "the greatest" of His subjects, was faithful only because he had been rewarded with prosperity.

"But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face." Stripped of his children, his property, and his health, sitting in the ashes and plucking at his sores, Job refused to "curse God and die," and endured the shallow lectures of friends who told him that he must have sinned, though he knew that he was blameless. Job wondered aloud why the wicked prospered, and why he had to suffer, in fact why he had been born at all. At last God appeared, told Job that his limited human idea of justice was inconsequential before the divine mystery of His will, received obeisance, and rewarded Job with an even

more prosperous life.

Jack was in no mood to accept a benevolent-parish-priest's ending to the story, and the obvious counter possibility must surely have occurred to him as he read it, he said later, "down to its tiniest detail in its entirety." What if? What if justice was nothing more than a heavenly crap game and one's deeds and one's rewards were unrelated? Or as the victim himself asked, "Why is light given to a man whose way is hid, and whom God hath hedged in?" Job scoured Jack's intellectual world clean, made fate and the cosmos into a pure reality of tumbling dice, and left him ready to read one more master--a gambler named Dostoyevsky.

Over the next two years, Jack would read all of Dostoyevsky's major works, until Raskolnikov, Myshkin, Kirilov and Karamazov were names as familiar to Jack as Apostalakis and Sampas. But he began his study with the gloomy nameless voice (which I shall call D) of the Notes from Underground. D opened his narration with the words, "I'm a sick man . . . a mean man." He was a totally alienated bureaucrat--spiteful, perverse, and depraved. Pathologically sensitive, D lived in a pathetic fantasy world where he made world peace and forced the Pope to flee to Brazil, leaving him to be honored at a ball on Lake Como--which had been moved to Rome for the occasion. D followed such dreams with a description of forcing himself on a party of celebrants who despised him, who sat and laughed while he walked back and forth at their side,

"ignoring" them. D was a mouse, a denizen of the underground, a midget Hamlet frozen in intellect and doubt, who saw far too many angles and reasons for things, and remained stagnant, tormenting himself. Sunk in despair--"But then, it is in despair that we find the most acute pleasure, especially when we are aware of the hopelessness of the situation"--he dictated a philosophical monologue together with a memoir of certain incidents in his life.

Notes from Underground was a frightening confession, truth in all loathsome detail, as D stood morally naked before Jack's eyes. It was classic prophecy, raging at the foul corruption of the world, but since Dostoyevsky had nearly faced the firing squad and had spent years in Siberia for being involved in "revolution," his solutions were religious and not political. But if Dostoyevsky was a mystic Christian nationalist, he was also unsure of his faith in God. And though he preached Christian love and submission, his ambivalence made D not merely a dummy for the Lord to smite, but an authentic louse. For at the end of the story D went to a sad nameless whore, fucked her, then out of guilt sang of the glories of love to her, urged her to free herself from the brothel, told her to come and see him. When she did, he reviled and humiliated her, sent the poor woman on her way, and told himself, "my insult will elevate her, purify her through . . . through hatred . . . well . . . maybe through forgiveness." "What's better," D

mused, "cheap happiness or lofty suffering?"

Jack, an embryonic artist, felt that Dostoyevsky was right, that suffering was the only cause of awareness. By now he was ready to negotiate with Mephistopheles for the highest state of consciousness possible. And because suffering is <u>not</u> intellectual, Dostoyevsky and all of the major experiences of his life told him that modern liberal progress--"civilization"--was not real, not the omega of human existence, was a lie. For it was based on reason, and "reason is only reason, and it only satisfies man's rational requirements," wrote Dostoyevsky. "Desire, on the other hand, is the manifestation of life itself--of all of life--and it encompasses everything from reason down to scratching oneself. And although, when we are guided by our desires, life may often turn into a messy affair, it's still life and not a series of extractions of square roots." Only the independent free will meant anything to D--or Jack--and the blood thirsty "civilized" society around both of them seemed absurd at best . . . possibly mad.

Jack felt that prophecy deep inside. Billy Chandler, a close childhood friend, had been stationed in the Philippines, and was even then taking the long walk that lead to Bataan. As the war engulfed America's energy and awareness, Jack would contemplate the new reality of D's perspective, trying to make a mournful Dostoyevskian sense out of his times and his nation's changes.[2]

Lowell, Papa, the Sun all became insufferable; in March 1942 he caught a bus to Washington where GJ had a job and a place to stay waiting for him. He hadn't seen GJ in a while, and his buddy knew Jack had changed a lot. As GJ remembered it, "I was asleep and all of a sudden there was a light in my eyes and a gun in my face and a guy talking Cagney, 'You squealed you dirty rat and I'm gonna murderlize yah.' Jack would never have messed with guns before. He was real worried about hurting his parents . . . Memere didn't understand that he just had to be a writer . . . she didn't want to understand. Washington was crazy."

For the young poet who would study out his native land, the Capital was the perfect subject, a magnified version of the American future. Erected on the rational, progressive, liberal ideology of the New Deal, sealed over with the integration of an erupting military-industrial National Security establishment, the American government had become a Technocracy, a system where party labels and values had become subsumed to the demands of technical bureaucrats; all of it was caught precisely in the image of the Pentagon, the largest office building in the world. Jack worked on a Pentagon construction crew for a few days, and it affected him deeply. Arlington, Virginia, seemed like a death trap to

to him, and in his mind the Pentagon was "Gethsemane," where Christ died.

The government itself was growing so unbelievably that Civil Service tests were being given two and three times a day while Jack was in Washington, and it was growing in the direction of a neutral bureaucratic state. Agencies of social change like the Federal Writers Project, the WPA, the CCC, and the NYA all vanished, while the Army and allied offices mushroomed. More importantly, the number of Americans directly involved with the government--those who paid income tax--went from four million in 1929 to 30 million in 1942. At the heart of the matter, the war altered the nation's economic structure; though nearly two-thirds of the prewar GNP and virtually all of its manufacturing was the work of small business, the Revenue Act of 1940 and the appointment of Donald Nelson, Chief Buyer for Sears and Roebuck, as head of the War Production Board all signalled the accession of big business to power. The war redrew the very face of the land, pouring the bulk of its expenditures into the South, Southwest, and the Pacific Coast--the "Southern Rim"--creating standardized boom towns that would serve as models for post-war suburbia.

For his part, Jack knew only that Washington was enormous, crowded, busy, "crazy." Intuitively Jack was aware of a different change; every time he screwed a willing lady on newspapers laid down in a park it was clear that the old

moral code, aside from his enduring worship of marriage, had all but disappeared. Twenty years old, he even let himself be "kept" by a waitress girlfriend for a brief period, and after quitting the Pentagon job and later a job as short-order cook and soda jerk, he went back to Lowell thinking about getting laid in ways that would have made no sense to Ti Jean. Easy "pussy" was not just sex to his Myshkin soul, but a symbol of an America lost and mysteriously changed, as unfamiliar as his own new personality.

Swirled up in the frenzy, he touched down in Lowell only briefly before hitching to Boston with Sammy to get Coast Guard papers for shipping out as a merchant seaman. Sammy had lost his scholarship at Emerson College in Boston, his railroad job was uninspiring, and he wanted to join Jack and travel. Jack was actually relieved when his papers came through first, telling Sammy, "I just wanta be away from you and Lowell and New York and Columbia for a long while and be alone and think about the sea." The craziness intensified; he hitched to Boston with another buddy and joined the Marine Corps; released in the afternoon to set his affairs in order, he elected to forget them in Scollay Square, Boston's sleazy equivalent of Times Square, and, "serious even in his dissipations," he ended up so drunk that he slept that night hugging a toilet, absorbing the piss and puke of America's sailors as if in some loathsome baptism of the sea. Because the next morning he woke up,

dove into the harbor and cleaned off, and went to the local National Maritime Union hall and signed up as a scullion on the S.S. Dorchester, sailing the following day, July 22, 1942, for Greenland. Saying goodbye to a tearful Sammy on the docks was hard; each saw deathflowers in the other's eyes. They weren't silly romantics; it was the last time they would ever see each other.

Jack did not choose to be a sailor out of cowardice. As his ship steamed out of Boston Harbor, the Army had lost 1,400 dead, the Navy 3,420; the NMU, with one tenth the men of the Navy, had lost nearly 2,000, and two ships a day were sinking into the Atlantic. He chose it because it was a looser, hipper organization. The Merchant Marine was the only integrated service in America, and the NMU was a militantly left wing group, many of whose members were veterans of the Spanish Civil War. Its negotiators had won Jack time to himself on board with an eight hour day for one hundred dollars a month and a one hundred dollar monthly war bonus. The bag he carried on board filled with clothing and a load of classical literature caused him trouble as a punk college football player, but he felt that "being misunderstood [was] like being the hero in the movies." He was a silent, moody, romantic youth preoccupied by death, scribbling into his journal, "Death hovers over my pencil," and writing of the non-stop poker games that "the stake is money and the stake is life." Driving himself to press the limits of human ex-

perience, he was unafraid. Death seemed a "deep, joyful, even pleasant thought at times, full of dark heroism and wonder, a magnificent thought."

He felt cleansed and free out on the pure ocean, and he stood on deck for hours staring at the flanking destroyers on the horizon as the green breakers crashed over the bow. Wallowing in the greasy slop of scullionhood was less pleasant. Old Glory, the six foot six-inch black boss cook, was outrageous enough to be entertaining as he laid out an unendingly cynical monologue on the ways of mankind. The gay pastry cook who jacked off into the cake mix, the Abraham Lincoln Brigade steward, and the dagger-carrying Moro deckhands all made for interesting breaks in the routine, but it was a largely meditative trip. Poker and rumors were the crew's main pastime on the Dorchester, and since Jack was broke and silent, his only companions were his log, death thoughts, and the sea itself--his brother. The ship was ferrying construction workers to a base in Greenland, and the icebergs floating in green seas under the thin blue-ice sky were nothing like the Polynesian fantasies he'd enjoyed in Boston. He had few illusions about patriotism, either. When their destroyer escort sank a German submarine one morning as Jack fried bacon for one thousand men, his thoughts were with his blond German Billy Budd scullion counterpart; far below decks himself, he felt like a slave deep in the hold of the ship, and took to carrying a razor

blade for suicide should they sink. It seemed to him that "the world was mad with war and history, and he could not understand it at all. It made great steel ships that could plow the sea, and then made greater torpedoes to sink the self same struggling ship. He suddenly believed in God somehow, in goodness and loneliness." Losing their partner ship, the U.S.S. Chatham, to torpedoes on the return run did nothing to nullify that sense of madness, and the run ended with the gross and appropriate absurdity of an enormous, feather-blizzarding pillow fight amongst the crew in an empty worker's dormitory.[3]

In October 1942 the Dorchester docked in Boston, and Jack strode off the ship overjoyed at being back in America. Lowell was a pleasure to visit this time, for he was a man now, had a place in the world, could look Leo in the eye and talk about his work. Jack didn't stay long in his hometown, however, for a day or two after his arrival he received a telegram from Lou Little that read, "You can come back on the team if you want to take the bull by the horns." In a wrenchingly swift change, just three days off his ship he was washing dishes--this time for Columbia--reading Hamlet, and trying to get ready for the West Point game. Army was captained by Hank Mazur, a Lowell High Senior

when Jack was an under classman, and Jack wanted revenge on the haughty boy who had once pushed him out of the showers. Crouched on the sidelines at Baker Field, Jack pleaded with Little: "Get in there now, Coach?" Lou wouldn't put him in. "You lost too much weight at sea," he said, and ignored both Jack's vows to smear Mazur and Leo's later description of the Coach as a "banana nose crook." Robbed of the profound human meaning of a direct confrontation with his past, football seemed trivial, bloodless, a film whose colors had been leached away. A week later, Jack sat in his room as the snow dropped, thinking about scrimmaging in the mud and snow, as the radio began to play Beethoven. "Dum dum dum dummmmmmmmmmmmmm . . . . . ." "I'm going to be an artist," he said. "I'm not going to be a football player." He never played again. Instead of suiting up, he went home to read, sip coffee, and stare into the blank future, wondering what was going to happen.

Waiting for the draft in Lowell was no better that winter than the one before, and Jack's only useful occupation was hand printing the novel he had written on the Dorchester, "The Sea Is My Brother." Drunk one night, feeling the weight of his travel and experience, he tried to strike back at his past once more before leaving for the Navy, and vowed to screw Mary Carney. She laughed at his futile, fumbling efforts to penetrate her thick rubber girdle-shield, and he went home with his head hanging

out the bus window, vomit interspersed with curses.

In February 1943 he entered the Navy, and got along with it no better than he had with Mary Carney. He was almost 21, while his comrades were mostly 18. Boot Camp's disciplinary methods--the seemingly useless labor of washing garbage cans, the petty rules about cigarette smoking, close-order drill--were designed to mold individuals into obediant and cohesive team members, and Jack was incapable of being a team member or even of understanding the program's rationale; he wanted the Commandant at Newport Naval Station to hire "shits" to wash the cans. Ever the writer, he tried to adopt the attitude of Melville's little man Bartleby, who had said, "I would prefer not to." Sammy was also a heavy part of Jack's thoughts. Sam had enlisted in the Army, and was presently a guard at the Camp Lee stockade. His letters meditated on Spengler and spontaneity in art, and on the artist's--and the citizen's--duty. He told of a prisoner who pointed at him and repeated Thoreau's classic comment to Emerson, "You are the real prisoner." A few months later, Sam wrote another friend, "Somehow out of all this catastrophe and chaos, I've lost myself completely in something greater than myself, but I'm finding something ultimately for I've found a religious sustenance to see me through the darkest days." To Jack, he could only pray that God did exist, and though he encouraged Jack with the pledge "I have kept faith," it was not enough.

One day at drill Jack simply opted out, laid down his gun, and went to the library to read in quiet. He played the hustle, demanded aspirin for non-existence headaches, and entered the psychiatric ward, there to be terrified by some of his more wild-eyed fellow inmates. As he watched frustrated guards beat patients, he was troubled with the age-old question, "Who is really insane around here?" Eventually, the guards caught him and a buddy named Big Slim pocketing butter knives and sent them straitjacketed to Bethesda Naval Hospital. Leo came to the hospital and ranted to the doctors about the Jewish-Marxist conspiracy and how the "Germans should not be our enemies but our allies," but that didn't free Jack. It took a liberal Jewish psychiatrist, who believed Jack when he likened himself to Samuel Johnson, and said, "I'm too much of a nut and a man of letters" to be in the Navy, that he couldn't submit to military discipline. In May 1943 he received an honorable discharge for "indifferent character," but his madhouse dreams would recur for a decade.

Once again Jack couldn't fit in. He was at a crux in his life, and he chose or was compelled--who can say?--to follow an anarchic path away from the American mainstream. At the moment, he only knew he wasn't cut out to wear a regular uniform. In a bitter, aged moment twenty-five years later, Kerouac regretfully wrote that the madhouse experience at Bethesda came to represent his "lost

dream of being a real American man."

In an historical sense he was quite right; a man who could not submit to discipline was not a normal, a "real" American by the middle of the 20th century. World War II was the most powerful collective experience in American history, realigning the structure of American culture so deeply that those who did not accept large-scale organized life patterns like big business or suburbia were misfits. The war's simple lesson was that God was not on the side of the brave or virtuous, but rather that the nation with the most efficient industrial structure and the most sophisticated scientific establishment would prevail. White coated Merlins on both sides had, by the end of the war, conjured up realistic miracles like jets, missiles, radar, silicone, new plastics, DDT, sulfa drugs, and the atomic bomb. America's largest single magazine, Life, gave regular and dramatic coverage of scientific war-waging with pieces on "Industrial Chemistry / It Meets the Demands of War," "Magnesium," "Rockets," "Mathematics," "Plastics," and "Mechanical Brains." Progressive education at American colleges almost vanished, to be replaced with a more disciplined, scientific approach. In the years following the war, academic disciplines like economics, political science, and sociology were all swept with a rage for quantification and scientific models; American philosophy was almost totally Positivist, the philosophy of science. Off-campus, science

fiction replaced the pulp magazines of Jack's day as young American boys' reading matter, and within sci-fi itself, Astounding Stories' sophisticated use of hard technical data killed off old-time "John Carters on Mars" fantasy and substituted spaceships flying mathematically accurate orbits.

Science assumed its cultural influence in more subtle ways than the powerful but obvious image of the white lab coat. The unstated ideological girder for the entire process of large scale bureaucratic wartime--and socially, the war never ended--organization was that it was neutral, dispassionate, "scientific."[4]

Jack flunked chemistry and he did not consciously think much about science, but he arrived at similar conclusions concerning the soulless, anti-human nature of his native land through his own method, direct personal experience. He felt, saw, experienced the dismemberment of the American family.

Processed out of the Navy in June 1943, Jack headed home, not to Lowell but to a dull apartment above a drugstore on busy Cross-Bay Boulevard in Ozone Park, Queens. Leo and Gabrielle had joined the flood of American migrants searching for work and family, and now Papa worked in a Canal Street print shop, while Memere assumed her usual position behind a skiving machine in Brooklyn. Aside from their new jobs, with Nin in the WAACs and Jack planning to ship out as a

merchant seaman, New York was central to their children. Leo and Gabrielle were among millions. Blacks by the hundreds of thousands were leaving the South for Los Angeles, San Francisco, Detroit, and other industrial centers. Millions more had escaped dead small towns to cluster in boom towns--and stayed, far away from other generations, in-laws, roots. Sixteen million men moved at least temporarily away from home to enter the service, and many million women moved after them, following their husbands and leaving behind a lasting image of haggard, exhausted young ladies in bus or train station chairs, waiting, waiting. Their children paid a war tax as well. Their mothers made up one third of the work force, and with their fathers gone and no supervision, often living in new and unfamiliar neighborhoods, American children were lost and disturbed. In New York City while Jack waited at the hiring hall for a ship out, vagrancy and sex charges on teenage women had nearly doubled in the past year; "Victory Girls," they called them. Leo was neither young nor female, but Jack could see the war in his eyes, too, in the frightened look of a lonely townsman stunned by the exotic sight of rabbis or wealthy women, by a city that overwhelmed his Nashua-bred soul. Once while walking in the lower east side with Gabrielle, some rabbis walking arm in arm would not part for them, and Leo knocked one into the gutter with his broad belly. Not only was Jack a transient but Nin had left

the church to divorce Charles Morrisette before joining the WAACs and moving thousands of miles away. Leo's ordered life had been swept away, and his loneliness and painful fear silently transmitted a thousand deep lessons to his son.

Many people were as confused and upset as Leo, and Americans nursed their wounds with the balm of human sentimentality. A gentle sigh for old, gracious ways lurked even in Hollywood or Broadway's most passionately patriotic events. James Cagney's Yankee Doodle Dandy and Irving Berlin's This is the Army were actually moderate compared to Jack's own special film, The Sullivans. On the run after his, the Dorchester had sunk with terrible losses, and its four chaplains had captured the nation's imagination by giving away their life-jackets. Hollywood's version of it focused on four brothers named Sullivan in the crew, and ended as the youngest raced off to join his brothers in the clouds of Heaven, calling out, "Hey, Wait for Me!"

Vaudeville enjoyed a revival, and the rage of 1943 was "Pistol Packin' Mama," which joined Bing Crosby's "White Christmas" and Glen Miller's "Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree" in the war song sugary hall of fame. "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition," another popular song, indicated the strength of traditional, usually gentle, religion, running from Bing Crosby and Barry Fitzgerald's classic Going My Way to A. J. Cronin's The Keys of the Kingdom to The Song of

Bernadette, a smash book for a year, and later a popular movie starring Jennifer Jones as the discoverer of the waters at Lourdes.

But Bing was middle-aged and Jack was young, and for him and his generation, there was ultimately only one sentimental artist during World War II. The hero of Jack's generation was a hollow-cheeked skinny kid with jughandle ears, a golf ball Adam's apple, and a voice that slid up your spine and made you cry, and his name was Frank Sinatra. Jack went to see him at the Paramount, the only male--as he later recalled--in a line of two thousand screaming teenage girls, but when Frank sang "Mighty Like a Rose" and "Without a Song . . . the road would never end," he sighed too. Tender, wistful, vulnerable, Sinatra was the first super-star of youth, and he stood artless before his swooning fans as the eternal adolescent in an adult world gone amok. Alone on a mountain top years later, Jack sang Sinatra's songs to chase the blues away. But in the crazy war present, Sinatra was music for romance, and Jack was in love with a young woman named Edie Parker.

Henry Cru had showed her off to him the previous fall in the West End Cafe, and shortly thereafter they began going out. Just before shipping out in June, Jack went to see Edie in Asbury Park, New Jersey. Though he was glad to be out of the Navy, he was disturbed by other things; he had begun growing warts on his penis, and spent hours in toilets

examining the grim eruptions on his poor flesh. Edie soothed his worries. After a hot day on the beach, Jack inveigled his way between her legs with the aid of Noxema for her sunburn and a quickly purchased package of condoms. She was resigned, sighing, "I knew this would happen." Relieved that he could still function, Jack left for the sea; they planned to live together when he returned from his voyage.[5]

On a sweltering day in late June 1943, Jack boarded the S.S. George Weems, and it set sail for Liverpool flying the red dynamite flag for his cargo, 500 pound bombs. As it slipped past the Statue of Liberty--dimmed for the duration--the situation was very different from the year-past departure of the Dorchester. The three airplanes painted on the Weems' smokestack told the story; now the U.S. was not retreating, but fighting and winning. Midway, the Coral Sea, Guadalcanal and North Africa were all history, as was the German surrender at Stalingrad. While the Weems was at sea, the Allies would assault Sicily, and Italy would surrender. Jack kept writing.

He was able to use the purser's typewriter, and he continued to labor on "The Sea is My Brother." Awkward and violet though the prose was, those who read it felt the emotional rush of his experience. No more a scullion-in-the-bowels-of-hell, he was an ordinary seaman this run, a deck hand

standing watches and listening for hours to the hypnotic ssssshhhhhhhhhhing slosh of the bow break, lost in the magic liquid world that happens when it rains at sea, sky and ocean seem to blend, and one sails through a fluid sky to infinity. Once again he was a silent loner, slipping through the ship at sunset to check the blackout curtains, while doing his best, off duty, to sleep all the way to England. When awake, he stayed in his bunk and devoured John Galsworthy's Forsythe Saga, which gave him a taste of England, and also, he said, an idea "about sagas, or legends, novels connecting into one grand tale."

London, during his brief leave there, was everything he'd dreamed of, Shakespeare and Sherlock combined. He wore a "uniform," a black leather jacket, khaki shirt, and phony Merchant Marine brass hat, and looked the proper man of the sea as he paid homage at Lord Nelson's statue. Hyde Park struck him instantly with a vision of Dr. Jeckyll, though he probably hadn't expected to see the Americans playing softball there. He attended a performance of Tchaikovsky at the Royal Albert Hall, refused to be impressed by a seat-mate who displayed a copy of T. S. Eliot, and emerged into the utter darkness of blacked-out London to find the bars of Piccadilly Circus and a fur coat named Lillian who performed her services and possibly lifted his wallet with equal ease. Empty, the Weems bounced through a rough trip home, past the Irish cottages that made him think of Joyce, reaching

the Brooklyn docks in October of 1943. But just before it left Liverpool, Jack had a sudden burst of illumination, as his literary task crystallized within him, and his amorphous committment to art focused into a duty, a "lifetime of writing about what I'd seen with my own eyes," as he wrote years later, in whatever style he chose, all of it put together as a "contemporary history record for future times to see what really happened." He vowed that he would be a recording angel, a divine scribe, capturing on paper the life in front of him, even as the special angel of Gerard's death perched on his shoulder gave his visionary record a unique depth.

Paid off and drunk, Kerouac got on a subway that reeked of cinnamon to him and headed uptown to see his lady love, Edie Parker, who was sharing an apartment with her friend Joan Vollner. It was pouring rain as he cut through the Columbia campus from the Broadway subway stop to apartment 15 at 421 118th St. near Amsterdam Avenue, and he didn't feel a drop. His black leather jacket plopped into a chair, and as Edie's arms encircled his neck he said, "The first thing I'm going to do, Edie--" Then he noticed Joan. "Hello, Joan." Joan smirked and replied, "Ah ho, Ah ho, Edie's gonna get . . . screwed tonight." After a snack of cold asparagus and olives in mayonnaise, they fell into bed

for his sailor's welcome home, which proved to be even more exotic than he had expected; in his absence Joan had tutored Edie in the fine art of fellatio.

It was a particularly pretty fall in New York, if only because some two million chrysanthemums--donated by a philanthropist--bloomed for weeks in Central Park and Rockefeller Plaza, and for a time Jack even got along tolerably well with Memere and Leo. One night in October, the four of them went out for beers at a German tavern on Cross-Bay Boulevard, and life was reasonably mellow. Jack worked the winter away with odd jobs like switchboard operator, read and wrote and enjoyed his sex life.

The war ground on, limned in maps on the front pages of newspapers, black for the Nazis, red for the Soviets; a quarter-inch of color shift meant another thousand human beings had been consumed. Sam was now a corpsman at the Anzio front, writing letters home that spoke of freedom and democracy, that identified their struggle in the mud with his own past, the golden age of Athenian democracy. Sebastian continued to write poems, and published them in the service paper, the Stars and Stripes. One, "Cote D'Or," prophesied a future where another youth might stand at Anzio, "But he shall be a freeman's son, intelligent and strong / Nurtured in faith, and worthy of heroic song." Sam's passionate love of life endured even the savage misery of the war in Italy, and he wrote another poem, which he called "Rhapsody in Red."

Last night was hell,
Pack't upon hell.
And luddies blasted in the black
As Stukas strafed our posts again.
Oh! Mars was in a vaunted glory,
Extolling us,
Extolling them,
Gaily he dashed around and around and around
Last night he wore a carmine gown!
Last night he blazed with scarlet glory
You know that kind of red
Like when you cut your hand in winter
And you watch the valentine-shaped drops
warm blood
Falling softly on the satin softened snow . . .

His blood, his heart, his faith were intact.

And Sammy's richly gallant beauty became transmuted into a symbol, a magnificent symbol of love and sharing, but a symbol without physical reality nonetheless. Jack was only Sam's brother, and not his parent, and so he never received the telegram that read, "The War Department regrets to inform you . . .," but early in February 1944 he learned that Sam was dead. Happy as he was with Edie his lover, he was alone again, without his true and loyal friend, shivering like a four-year-old whose brother has just gone away to heaven, cosmically exiled from comradery once again.[6]

Pacing the cold and windy streets of New York City that night, he could only know that death had cursed him again, that the energy of war had reached out to consume what was good on the earth. Only a mournful, death-sensitive art could possibly justify the madness and cruelty of it all.

C H A P T E R V

VISIONS IN A WORLD OF MUSHROOM CLOUDS

Twelve years had passed in Jack's life between Gerard and Sammy, but it was not his destiny to wait very long for his third brother; Edie kept talking about an amazing kid who was hanging out at the West End Cafe. Short, thin, and attractive, Edie had what Jack thought of as a "birdlike intelligence," coming on slightly dumb to mask her perceptivity and very real good taste in people. So he listened to her and one night in June 1944 he went out to the bar, a Columbia student hang-out on Broadway across the street from campus. At first, he thought the kid--a mere 19 to his 22--was a "mischievous little prick," but soon enough Jack knew there was more to him than that.

Lucien Carr was quite simply the most beautiful man he'd ever seen, electric, with blond hair and slanting green cat's-eyes, a small but wiry build, and a sneer that gave his angel face a devilish quality, and hinted at the punk beneath, the attitude that was unafraid of rules, uninterested in conventionality, that "played at intellectual putdowns out of sheer high spirits," a friend later said, "out of a healthy sense of self." For Lucien was wholly unlike Jack; he was the product of an upper class St. Louis family, an aristocrat in family as well as physique. Had he been coarser, perhaps a little stupid, he could have qualified as an authentic

Regency rake, the wastrel younger son of some provincial family dispatched to London to swill champagne, pinch maids, and run up gambling debts. In war-time New York City, Lucien was a Columbia freshman, having already been evicted from the Bowdoin College and the University of Chicago, and instead of being an oafish squire, he seemed more like Rimbaud, whose portrait he eerily resembled.

Immediately they began carousing together as brothers in spirit, floating out of the West End in liquified bliss until Lucien had Jack jump into an empty barrel and then rolled him down the empty sidewalks of late-night upper Broadway. A few nights later they anointed each other with bottles of black ink as they sat in the gutter in a pouring rain singing foolish songs, especially the summer's hit, "You Always Hurt the One You Love." Lucien was "wild," and his way with Jack wholly lacked Sam's tenderness; he was stunned to find in Jack "No resentment . . . no rancor at all," and he loved him. Still, his cynicism laced Jack's serious peasant virtue with scorn; Lucien called him a "mean old tightfisted shitass no good Canuck . . . Indian no good bully." "I'm no bully," Jack would reply to the mockery, and Lucien always had a topper. "Well bully for you, give me a drink."

Lucien's style and class kept Jack off-balance and amazed--once Jack became angry and protested that it was unfair when three men jumped Lucien, and Carr sneered, "Oh let's have more of those splendid Lowell mill worker remarks!"

Yet strikingly different as the two men were, art and affection bound them securely together. Like his patron Rimbaud, Lucien danced on the tightrope of his sensibilities not as an entertaining pose but because he--and Jack and their other friends--sought more from life than the present rules implied was available; they were serious if obstreperous pilgrims in search of what they called the "New Vision."[1] Their comrades in the quest were equally provocative, and in the week following Jack's first encounter with Lucien, three more men would step into the apartment on 118th St. and have a profound impact on his life, as important as anything that had happened to him since Gerard.

One of them was Allen Ginsberg.

Jack was sitting in the apartment eating breakfast early one afternoon when Ginsberg walked in, a skinny 17-year-old boy with stickout ears who announced, as his head slid past the door, that "Discretion is the better part of valor." Jack laughed. He noticed the boy's horn rim glasses, so much a part of the costume of "nice Jewish boy from Jersey," but he also noticed the intensely burning black eyes behind them, and they began to talk about Dostoyevsky. Ginsberg's pat phrase about discretion, an imitation of his father Louis, accurately characterized Allen's "own closet timidity and provinciality." But Jack also felt that Allen was "exalted" like Sammy, and soon adopted him as a very-much-

younger brother. Perhaps he caught sight of Allen's notebook, across whose cover read the words, "Now, from the cracked and bleeding heart, triumphantly, I fashion--Art!" He was never ordinary, this child who had at age 10 staved off bullies with an unending string of polysyllabic words, and declared at 14 that "I'll be a genius of some kind or other, probably in literature." "Either I'm a genius, I'm egocentric, or I'm slightly schitsophrenic [sic]. probably the first two." Wounded by a mother enveloped in paranoid screaming madness, Allen felt he was a "lost child, a wandering child, in search of the womb of love." He had arrived at the Union Seminary dormitory he shared with Lucien incandescent with political idealism. He'd vowed as he went to take the college entrance examination that, should he pass, he would never betray his ideal, "to help the misery of the masses." His vow withered rapidly under Lucien's cynical tongue but his idealistic sensitivity remained. A few weeks after Jack and Allen met, Jack helped him move out of the dorm, and watched respectfully as Allen said goodbye to his room, to Lucien's room down the hall, to the steps. "Why, that's what I do!" exclaimed Jack, and what Allen thought of as a "transmission of real feeling" passed between them, solidifying their intellectual affinity with the nectar of friendship.

Lucien sent two other men to the apartment, men who with Ginsberg and Lucien himself formed the quartet that would

redefine Jack to himself. The first was William S. Burroughs, in one critic's words the "most highly enervated, hyperaesthetic specimen of humankind" that Jack would ever meet. Sitting in the apartment in his seersucker jacket and wire-rim glasses, he was tall, spare, and seemed to Jack "patrician thinlipped" and "inscrutable because ordinary looking." He bore a slight resemblance to the dry dead-pan protestant face of Buster Keaton. A few years later, the street boys of Tangiers called him "El Hombre Invisible." Though he received a small sum of money from his family every month, Bill was not a direct heir to the Burroughs Adding Machine fortune; still, his family was socially prominent in St. Louis. In 1944, Burroughs was thirty, a Harvard '36 graduate and former Viennese medical student who had worked as an ad-man, a detective, a bartender, and an insect exterminator.

Few enough bug killers are veterans of Harvard Yard, but nothing about Burroughs caught the eye at first. Even his voice, refined to the point of decadence, was dry, a slight midwestern drawl flattened through the nose. Yet more than his subtle brilliance or his homosexuality marked Burroughs as different. As a friend wrote of him much later, "All of us who failed to participate in the war effort owing to one form of unclubbability or another have, I think, felt the necessity to conduct private wars of our own." Jack probably noticed that the first joint of Bill's right finger was missing; only later would he discover that

Burroughs had himself chopped it off to impress someone as a "Van Gogh kick." Ostensibly he was there to pump Jack for information on shipping out in the merchant marine, but as Jack blah-blah-blahed his way through the details, he acquired a subtle friend in Burroughs who would teach him ideas that focused his intuitive feelings and expanded his sense of the possibilities of life in an absolutely crucial way.[2]

Tagging behind Burroughs was his old St. Louis friend David Kammerer, the tall red-bearded man who had already met Jack through Lucien at the West End, and who had brought Burroughs around to the apartment to make introductions. His was perhaps the strangest story of all. Kammerer was in love with Lucien Carr, so obsessed with the gorgeous young man who had once been a Boy Scout in his charge that he had chased him from St. Louis to Massachusetts to Maine to Illinois to New York, in the process helping Lucien be thrown out of several schools and also saving his life: In Chicago Lucien had put his head in an oven, and it had been David who had turned off the gas. He was a doppelganger with whom Carr was alternately coy or taunting, but whose sexual desires Lucien would not gratify; their connection was an intertwined mass of frustration that hinted morbidly of disaster.

Blood scent was an appropriate perfume for their "New

Vision"; the apocalyptic art that Lucien desired could hardly settle for anything but the absolute scent of life. Along with Celine Young, Lucien's blondly sensual, aristocratic and slightly dreamy girlfriend, the group circulated among the apartment on 118th St., Lucien's room in Warren Hall, Burroughs' apartment on Bedford Street in Greenwich Village, and George's Bar in Sheridan Square. Valeska Gert's, a '30s-sleazo-decadent-Berlin bar on West 4th St., was another regular set for their endless inquisitions into the state of the culture, and through an immense energy created by what Jack felt was self-hatred, Lucien took center stage, going deeper and further into the idea of the New Vision than the others cared to. Jack and Allen shared something different, for Allen was silently in love with the Jack he saw as "romantic, moody, darkeyed Dostoyevskian," and they joined in a more affable partnership concerned not only with identity in the midst of an overwhelming, chaotic world, but also the ancient rules of unity and literature, and death. Their hero was the human Faust of Goethe. Lucien, driven by his disgust at the human trap of life, sought even more than Nietzsche; he wanted to go beyond personality or intellect or the soul . . . to? Buried in Finnegan's Wake or Ulysses or The Magic Mountain, Jack was certain that art was his proper path, without the psychic edge Lucien advocated; nonetheless, he recognized in his brother's lectures a path for himself.

"Know these words," wrote Ginsberg, "and you speak the Carr language: fruit, phallus, clitoris, caecoethes, feces, foetus, womb, Rimbaud." "Prurience" was another favorite; Lucien and Celine clutched and pawed at each other, but kept their underwear on, Allen was as yet a virgin, and Jack remained a compulsive masturbator as always, so that their discussions were flavored with the mysto-decadent excitement of voyeurs, the sickly sweet, poisonous atmosphere of a lewd old man peering through a keyhole at a girl-child undressing. As Baudelaire said, "Consciousness in doing Evil!" Or as he further put it, "Packed tight, like hives of maggots, thickly seething / Within our brains a host of demons surge. / If Rape or arson, poison or the knife, / Has wove no pleasing patterns in the stuff / of this drab canvas we accept as life-- / It is because we are not bold enough!"

Hunched over their worn copies of Rimbaud's A Season in Hell, they were living Flaubert's words: "When the exterior world is disgusting, enervating, corruptive, and brutalizing, honest and sensitive people are forced to seek somewhere within themselves a more suitable place to live." With Rimbaud, they had rejected "Science, the new nobility! Progress. The world moves on! Why shouldn't it revolve?" they asked. "This is the vision of numbers. We are on our way to the spirit." Lucien in a red shirt gulped Pernod and arrogantly proclaimed to Allen, "I tell you that I re-

pudiate your little loves, your little derivative morality, your hypocritical altruism, your foolish humanity obsessions, all the loves and penalties of your expediant little modern bourgeois culture." The prurience, the booze, the marijuana they had begun to smoke, the all night coffee and cigarette talk sessions all fueled their obsession with Rimbaud's last and most potent question: "When will we go, beyond the beaches and the mountains, to greet the birth of the new task, the new wisdom, the flight of tyrants and demons, the end of superstition; to adore--the first ones!--Christmas on Earth?"[3]

For oddly enough, what they found in the dives, the gutters, the sewers of Manhattan was a sacrament, "Christmas on Earth," a religious sensitivity to death, mortality, generations, to the poignancy of moment and the passing of time. Oh, God was dead all right. Allen was a Jew in birth only, and when Jack talked of the church it was in a melancholy tone, chuckling sadly over the time he confessed to playing with another boy, and the priest asked him, "How long was it?"

Rather showily, Allen announced in his journal that the "New Vision lies in a highly conscious comprehension of universal motives, and in a realistic acceptance of an unromantic universe of flat meaninglessness." Their tutors--the renegades of high culture like Yeats, Rimbaud, and Baudelaire--had abandoned politics and religion for beauty, a beauty unrelated to nature, since God its creator was dead and since

nature was not real"; we know only what we perceive and art determines what we perceive. But the New Vision celebrated the transcendental act of making art more than beauty the product, and Jack took from Nietzsche the phrase, "Art seducing me to a continuation of life." He did not see any rational justification for art; it was merely what gave meaning to his life--and what reminded them all of the profound sacramental insight that life is transient, illusory. While America bought warbonds, invested in reality and security, these new visionaries shivered and read another Faust, who came a-preaching tenderness, pity, and art through suffering, Shakespeare's own Prospero:

> Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
> As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
> Are melted into air, into thin air.
> And like the baseless fabric of their vision,
> The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
> The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
> Yea, all of which it inherits, shall dissolve,
> And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
> Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on; and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep.

Not that it was a morbid summer for Jack. He found Lucien a rainbow flash of color coming on top of the darkness of sea, and the more Jack saw of Burroughs the more interesting he became. Lucien was fond of "actes gratuites," absurd and spontaneous displays that shattered middle class conventions, but Bill could top them with such macabre, un-

blinking coolness that he seemed almost devilish. Once at Bill's apartment, Lucien stunned Jack by chewing on a glass until the blood ran down his chin. Ever the gracious host, Burroughs offered them a snack, and disappeared into the kitchen to rummage a minute before returning with his "mother's delicacies"--a plate of razor blades and light bulbs. Sitting in the park a few days later, Bill asked Jack why he refused to wear his merchant marine uniform and get an easy serviceman's war-time entry into movies and clubs. Clad in his t-shirt and chino pants, Jack virtously replied, "'Tsa finkish thing to do." Bill twitched, blinked, and observed that "It's a finkish world." Yet Jack was not naive, for at his personality's core there was what he called a "materialistic Canuck taciturn cold skepticism"; it was Allen who was the butt of the mockery. Lucien took the future labor organizer in hand and showed him a working class bar at 125th St. and Broadway, snickering, "You've never labored in your life. You'd feel like a self-conscious idiot if you went in there." Rather quickly, Allen's interests shifted from pre-law to literature. Social class was, however, part of the group's dynamic; Jack had an enormous social inferiority complex around someone like Lucien, particularly when Lucien met Leo, and Papa became resentful. Jack was a "working man proletarian Jack London redneck," thought Allen, verbally pugnacious when pressed and always "emotionally aware of class." Actually, politics was not a

major interest for any of them, although they agreed on a vaguely anarchistic hatred of bureaucracy and the smothering welfare state . . . a reactionary working class perspective they shared with Leo.

Despite the steamy heat, New Yorkers were enjoying the summer of 1944. Shortwave, on-the-scene reporters, and tape-recordings had brought D-Day--the long awaited second front--as close as the radios blaring out open windows into 118th St., and as the Allies punched through the hedgerows on their drive to Paris, it seemed as if this would be the last summer of war. Rationing regulations had eased, money loosened, and party life revived. Jack was restless. Edie kept talking about getting married, and he was broke anyway, so August seemed like an opportune moment to ship out, this time for real. In May he had taken a bus to New Orleans to catch a ship, but the trip had ended in drunken letters back to New York that pleaded for travel money home; later it had seemed foolish, merely an excuse for seeing the South, and the only memory worth preserving was an afternoon stop in Asheville where he got drunk with Thomas Wolfe's older brother, the two of them sitting in the parlor listening to the Kentucky Derby as they stared at a melancholy picture--just like Gerard's--of Wolfe's beloved oldest brother "Ben." Fleeing the August heat, Jack and Lucien

lay on the grass of Riverside Park at 116th St., contemplated their situation, and decided to escape New York.

Lucien had his own reasons for escape; David Kammerer was becoming too intense, too weird. He had begun to slip into Lucien's apartment in the middle of the night, there to stand and stare at him as he slept. Things were a little twisted all the way around; magazine coverage of the war grew increasingly gory, splashing brutally graphic closeups of Japanese suicides into Jack's eyes. Tense and fretful, Lucien had spotted a hole in Burroughs' vintage seersucker jacket the night before, inserted his finger and shredded the sleeve before Kammerer joined in to dismember it entirely. David had also tried to hang Jack's cat, though Burroughs had saved it. Gerard had once said that "God gives us kittens to teach us how to pity," and for Jack the idea of maiming such a love symbol was monstrous. Even though he didn't find out about it until much later, trouble hung palpably heavy in the still late-summer air.[4]

Gazing fitfully at the gray Hudson River from beneath the trees of Riverside Park, Jack and Lucien conjured up an adventure. Hemingway be damned, they'd jump ship in Le Havre, and with Jack's rustic French and Lucien as a deaf-mute, they'd walk to Paris and beat the Army to liberation day for the drunk of a lifetime. Their dream closely resembled the movie they'd seen with Edie and Celine the previous week, Renoir's Grand Illusion. Appropriately, it was an anti-war film that

involved a Jew escaping from a military prison, along with a peasant type, played by Jack's old hero Jean Gabin, and an aristocrat. Lucien wanted to walk Montmartre like Rimbaud, "find symbols saturated in the gutters." He felt "like I'm in a pond that's drying out and I'm about to suffocate"; perhaps he was empathizing down very deep with the fate of the aristocrat in the movie. He fell from a height and died.

After several days of waiting, Jack and Lucien finally found berths through the NMU on the S.S. Robert Hayes, departing from New York for France on Sunday, August 13, 1944. Saturday night they cadged a last free meal from Burroughs and then joined Edie and Celine at Minnetta's Bar in the Village before winding up in an artist's loft on Macdougal St. for a final party. Incredibly, Kammerer interrupted their celebration; he had somehow succeeded in tracking them down and then had climbed onto a nightclub marquee and crawled in the loft's window. His relentless tenacity was unnerving. After sleeping late the next morning, Jack and Lucien rushed out and chased their ship down, first to Hoboken and at last to Brooklyn. Gleefully singing "What'll you do with the drunken sailor" and trying to ignore the thick pall of smoke from a burning freighter that shrouded the docks, they were met by a union delegate who warned them not to sign on because the First Mate was a "Fascist." Confused, they stowed their gear and then hit the food locker, gorging on roast beef and cold milk, loudly planning their

walk from Le Havre--and exulting in the absence of Kammerer.

Suddenly, their new First Mate materialized screaming curses before them, an enormous wraith who looked frighteningly like a beardless David. He had overheard their plans to jump ship and roared, "You didn't sign on. Fine. Now get the FUCK off this ship you cocksucking no good little pearly-assed punks." The man was much too big to argue with, and with a parting "Fuck you," they disconsolately stumbled back out into the Brooklyn heat and returned to 118th St. to endure Edie and Celine's teasing. They moped around the apartment, dully furious at their luck, fighting the intransigent sizzle of August in Manhattan with cold showers. As night fell and the streets cooled, they went to the West End for a beer. Jack left at midnight, ready to assault the NMU hiring line first thing in the morning. As he cut through the Columbia Campus past St. Paul's Chapel, he met David Kammerer, who wanted--as always--to know Lucien's whereabouts. Jack told him and then went home to sleep. It was so hot that he and Edie couldn't even lie close, but slept in the living room, optimistically exposed to any stray breeze the window might produce.

And then something happened; swimming out of the soft dark cloud of sleep at dawn, Jack became aware of Lucien shaking his arm. "Well," Lucien said, "I disposed of the

old man last night," and Jack knew instantly what he meant: David Kammerer was dead. Lucien was shaken but dry-eyed, gathering courage to give himself up to the police and the "hot-seat"; before doing so, he wanted Jack to help him dispose of Kammerer's glasses and the murder weapon, and to share with him one last drunk. Though Jack might smoke marijuana and attack many of the technocracy's laws, he was still enough of an altar boy to obey most of them. Yet he went with Lucien because Carr was his brother, because in this absurd world loyalty at least still mattered. Jack showered and dressed, kissed Edie good-bye, and began to pump Lucien for information.

"What'd you really do?"

"I stabbed him in the heart 12 times with my boy scout knife," Lucien said.

David Kammerer had caught up with Lucien for the last time at the West End, and when it closed they ended up at Riverside Park, quite near where Lucien and Jack had plotted their trip to Paris. In the pre-dawn quiet, David had sworn his love, begged Lucien to let them ship out together, threatened him, tried to embrace him. Finally, as Jack later told the story, Lucien asked David if he wanted to die. It was far too late for any answer but "Yes," and the opened 'scout knife plunged to Kammerer's heart, blood spilling out of his mouth as he fell to the ground moaning, "So this is how David Kammerer ends." Panicky, Lucien bound David's hands and feet with shoe laces, then tied rocks to the body with

pieces of his shirt. He stripped naked and pushed it out into the Hudson River, but the rocks were too light and it floated downstream, where the Coast Guard would later find it.

Instinctively, Lucien ran to Burroughs for advice. Summoning up his last theatrics, he greeted Bill at the door by offering him a smoke from the bloody package of Lucky Strikes. Inside, he kept babbling about the "hot-seat," the enormous grim electric chair at Sing-Sing Prison that the State of New York surely had waiting for him. Bill didn't let him down. He seemingly lifted a scene from Gide's The Counterfeiter, in which Edouard was blackmailed by a young thief, who threatened to report him for "improper advances" if his theft were revealed; in any case, Bill calmly questioned him, then told him to go home, get a lawyer through his mother, and plead self-defense against rape, what the Daily News would later tag an "honor slaying."

Burroughs' good advice had to wait for a day, and Lucien went next to Jack, filling him in on the story as they walked down 118th St. to Morningside Park, where Jack drew attention by pretending to take a leak and Lucien buried the bloody glasses. Later he dropped the knife into a sewer grating on 125th St. They headed for a cool zebra-striped bar, Lucien mumbling repeatedly over beers about the murder. He muttered, "He died in my arms," and thought of himself as the white-gloved aristocrat in Grand Illusion,

recalled their missed ship in Brooklyn, thought of the chair, the chair, the chair. Eventually they took a cab to Park Avenue where Lucien borrowed five dollars from his psychiatrist, then found a cool dark theater playing the movie Four Feathers, which featured an endless Technicolor succession of Sudanese rebels butchering English soldiers and vice-versa. One of the characters was named Burroughs, which made them wince. Hot dogs, Times Square, a visit to the Museum of Modern Art, another bar--the afternoon passed somehow. At last, in what he thought of as his final performance, Lucien stripped off his imaginary white gloves of aristocracy, handed them to his liege peasant Kerouac, and went to turn himself in to the police. Jack wearily got on the subway and returned to Edie and 118th St.

But Edie found out about David's death only when two plainclothes men arrived that night to arrest Jack as a material witness. After a night in a cell at the local precinct, Jack spent the next day in the D.A.'s office downtown, where he convinced his arresting officer, James O'Brien, that he was a heterosexual "swordsman," that the Daily News tag on the murder was true because Lucien wasn't a homo. "If he was," Jack said, "he'd have tried to make me." His tearfully passionate meeting with Edie reminded him of a Cagney picture, but his cell was more boring than any movie had ever been. Only the newspapers,

where the death had temporarily eclipsed news of George Patton's tanks smashing across France, were entertaining; the News featured a picture of Lucien on the riverbank at 116th St., and the Journal-American reported that Lucien's jail reading included Rimbaud and "A Vision," by William Butler Keats. Jack was so bored that when Allen--a wholly irrelevant witness--came to the D.A.'s office to try to publicize the New Vision, it seemed more amusing than irritating.

As an invasion of cold rain thundered down on the city on Thursday, August 17th, Jack and Lucien came together to be arraigned, Lucien whispering from the corner of his mouth, "Heterosexuality all the way." As Jack sat unconsciously whistling "You Always Hurt The One You Love," the judge set his bail at $5,000 and ordered him sent to the Bronx City Jail, the "Opera House" where the (stool) pigeons sing. Before he could go uptown, he had to go down, to East 21st St., and the hellish City Morgue, deep in the bowels of Bellevue Hospital. A fat attendant munching on a sandwich, cheese stuck in his teeth, whipped open Drawer 169 to reveal Kammerer. To Jack, he looked like a tormented patriarch, his beard jutting out, his corpse blue and bloated after two days in the river. It was his cock that really caught Jack's eye; it hadn't rotted yet.

Aside from the cold, ugly weather, the Opera House wasn't too awful. Reading Maugham's Cakes and Ale and Aldous

Huxley's Brave New World, Jack passed up the card games, but did spend some time conversing with various employees of Murder, Inc., all of whom found an excuse to stop by his cell and get the inside word on whether or not Lucien was a "queer." Things improved further on Saturday, August 19th, when Jack found out that he could post one hundred dollars and get out on bail. But the conversation with Leo was short and horrible, and as Jack hung up the phone he felt weak and deserted, his father's outraged words echoing in his brain: "No Kerouac ever got involved in a murder . . . I'm not going to lend you no hundred dollars and you can go to hell and I've got work to do, Good BYE!" Yet another guilt, yet another failure, were laid on his soul. Writing about that summer three years later, Jack moaned, "Something's happened to me! . . . I ought to be a real son. Why does it always have to be ought?"

But when you are an adult and can no longer cleave to your parents, you cling to your mate, and Jack called up Edie and proposed marriage, the plan being that she'd borrow the money from her family to bail him out, which he would repay by going to work in a Detroit factory before shipping out again on the merchant marine. On Tuesday, August 22nd, the District Attorney released Jack for the afternoon, and he and a burly Irish cop rode a subway down to City Hall. With Celine as the maid of honor and the cop as best man, Jack and Edie zipped through a Justice of the Peace service, then proceeded to the nearest bar. Bemused by his role as best man,

Jack's guard picked up the tab for an afternoon of pleasant drinking until Jack kissed Edie and returned to his cell and the lewd snickers of his cellmates. It took a while for the money to arrive from Michigan, and Jack read Gogol's Dead Souls while Lucien was indicted on second degree murder charges. At long last, on August 30th the judge reduced Jack's bail to $2,500, Edie posted bond, and he walked out. As the newly wedded couple prepared to leave for Grosse Pointe, Lucien remained in jail, reading Jude the Obscure and sympathizing with the "dark and hopeless" suicidal ending of Hardy's book. Burroughs, the other material witness, had already been bailed out by his family and returned to St. Louis. In mid-September Lucien pleaded guilty to manslaughter charges, and on October 6th he was sentenced to eighteen months in Elmira Reformatory.

Only Allen remained, "Faithful to the past," sickened with hepatitis and raging at a world he considered "neurotic and perverted." As far as he was concerned, the whole episode could be traced to the decline of the West; the circle of friends that had created the New Vision was finished, engulfed in the rising poisons of a dying culture.[5]

September, 1944: Americans were ecstatic at the liberation of Paris, and New York as well became a City of Light, as the blackout ended after eighteen months. Technical

gadgets like RDX plastic explosives and robot bombs made the news, as well as the shiniest new toy of them all--Television. "The next great development in radio is now ready for its enormous market," Life told America. Jack was in the nation's tool center, Detroit, counting ball bearings from midnight to eight in the morning and industriously applying himself to the study of American literary criticism. He was uncomfortable living in a Grosse Pointe home with silver, linen, and chandeliers, but although Memere and Leo had visited him in jail and all was forgiven, the ball bearing job was the only way to pay off his bond, so he persevered. Even Edie's mother, whose knowledge of the literary world extended no further than Pearl Buck, was impressed with his dedication and seriousness. By early October he had paid his debt and Edie's father arranged a ride to New York and the docks for him.

Waiting for his ship to sail, Kerouac went to the West End to hang out with Celine and Allen. Beautiful Celine was causing him problems. In the process of "dumping" Lucien, whom she felt was "messianic" about ridding the world of Kammerer, she was flirting with Jack, and though he managed to feel guilty about his disloyalty to Lucien, he spent the night making out with her and was disappointed when it went no further. She even got him into a fight. One night in the West End, she flirted with a couple of Navy officers, who began to heckle Jack and Allen. After a couple

of practice punches on the men's room wall, Jack came back to the table and in traditional fashion invited the officers outside. He gave as good as he got, and it was a draw when the bartender stopped the two to one brawl as unequal. It was no trivial event; violence disgusted his Gerardian soul, and the reality of a sidewalk dust-up meant more to Jack than all of World War II. It was very probably the last time Jack Kerouac ever hit another human; there were any number of stories later of his being hit and refusing to respond in kind.

The judge at his hearing had joked that the sailor was safer at sea, but long before his ship reached Norfolk, Jack was angry and afraid. His new bosun kept riding him, calling him "handsome" and "Sweetie-Pie," and far more than the sexuality involved, this ugly manipulation led Jack to jump ship in Norfolk and return to New York, where he tried metaphysically to force himself through despair up against his own personality. He was almost totally alone. His wife and family thought he was at sea, and only Celine and Allen, who had gotten him a room on campus and some books from the Columbia Library, knew of his whereabouts. Convulsed by Lucien's pain and the shattered state of his own life, Jack hurled himself at art on both emotional and intellectual levels--"Self-Ultimacy," he called it. It was a spasm of romantic artistic purity so intense that he burned almost all that he wrote. In the flickering light of a candle, he gouged

himself and in his own blood wrote "The Blood of a Poet" on a card, then pinned it up on the wall, along with Rimbaud's "Christmas on Earth" quotation and Nietzsche's statement, "Art is the highest task and the proper metaphysical activity of this life."

Though abstract ideas were never his main strength, he sat in Hartley Dormitory and filled reams of paper with speculations on a host of European thinkers, ranging from Gide to Thomas Mann to Yeats and Joyce. He sought to fuse Huxley's idea of ceaseless growth with Freud, comprehend the artistic spirit of Dionysus and "Sexual neo-platonism" while rejecting bourgeois culture and political liberalism. More powerful than thought, however, was the profound impact of sheer experience, the emotional rush, as he told Allen, of being "In that far city and to feel the smothering pain of the unrecognized ego." Self-Ultimacy was war, as serious as the Battle of the Bulge, an effort to snuff out all that was false in himself and his culture, to reach a state wherein art would become a holy duty that transcended all intellectual concepts. Ideally, phoenix-like out of the ashes of his old self would come a new personality capable of an extraordinary grace of perception and intercourse.

Biweekly drunks with Allen Ginsberg were his sole diversion, and Jack was gaunt and wasted when Burroughs returned to New York in early December and came to visit.

Bill sniffed and snorted at the blood and candles, then said, "My God, Jack, stop this nonsense and let's go out and have a drink." Kerouac lurched up out of his chair, and though he realized it only later, the walk to the nearest bar conceded the futility of Self-Ultimacy; he needed his models in the flesh, and Burroughs, the skinny near-ghost walking in front of him, was going to be his prophet for the next year.

A man once sang, "To life outside the law you must be honest," and the line fit Jack's new teacher with a vengeance. Burroughs had long since intellectually exiled himself from America and its cultural precepts, but he was a very special sort of outlaw, something of a cosmic hybrid between Jesse James and Ralph Waldo Emerson. He had deeply impressed Jack and Allen with his compassionate treatment of Lucien in August. Dispassionate, as well; David Kammerer had been Burroughs' life-long friend, and what struck the younger men most, aside from Bill's fearlessness in dealing with the police, was that he didn't seem to make moral judgements in personal situations, only perceptive observations. And so, mostly in an apartment they shared on West 115th St., Jack followed Bill into what he later called "a year of low, evil decadence" fashioned from amphetamine, cigarettes, coffee, and endless dark considera-

tion of the corruption of the post-war world. The 115th St. apartment was a very special place, a Magic Theater of sorts; surely few places in 1945 America balanced so harmoniously Times Square hustlers, drugs, and a bookshelf with Yeats, Celine, Rimbaud, Blake, Spengler, Kafka and Korzybyski. The apartment began its portentious career with Joan Vollner, once Edie's roommate. Joan was a dark, attractive woman, humorously cynical, intelligent and cool, something of a female counterpart to Burroughs. A widow with one child, she also had a strongly developed taste for the sweet rush of Benzedrine, which in those days involved buying nasal inhalers, removing the small pads of soaked paper from the split open case, then gobbling the paper for all-day highs.[6]

Around Christmas, 1944, Edie returned from Detroit, and she and Jack moved in with Joan. The reconcilation quickly failed; by mid-January she was back in Detroit, writing strange letters to Allen. Edie had never been entirely comfortable with Jack's aesthetic intellectualism, and her letter to Allen was a petition for tutoring. "I want you to form a private education for me such as books to read like the ones you first read. Give me questions on them. Then when you think you [sic] understand the book thoroughly why give me another and so on . . ." She went so far to threaten to expose Allen's "secret"--his homosexuality--if he failed her. It was not merely that she lacked the background to talk for hours with people whose favorite phrase was "supreme

reality"; her letter came on the stationery of the Michigan Social Register, which alone suggested her incompatibility with the 115th St. den.

January 1945 was an eventful month for the circle of friends. Despite his unhidden and predominant predeliction for male sex partners, Burroughs married Joan Vollner on January 17th, and moved into the apartment. Allen also moved in, but under different circumstances: He was expelled from Columbia in an escapade that was sad, funny, bizarre and revealing.

Superficially, Allen was a model student--an editor of the humor magazine the Jester, a member of the literary society Philoxean, a History pre-law major. But he wasn't servile enough, and with Burroughs as an alternative teacher, he kept raising objections to the content of the English Department courses, in which Whitman was a "creep," William Carlos Williams "unknown," and John Crowe Ransome and Allen Tate the "supreme literary touchstones," and in which American novel courses ended with Edith Wharton. It was more than that, of course; as Diana Trilling, wife of Allen's mentor Lionel later put it, "He made life too messy." Incapable of understanding his experiments in sensation seeking, she and the rest of the Columbia establishment categorized him as a status seeker, a careerist, as a potential threat to their neat lives. Off-campus, Johnny the bartender at the West End had complained to the Dean, and the Dean to Allen's father Louis,

about Allen's late and noisy hours there. But it was a dirty window that finally nailed Allen. He didn't get along very well with his maid, so out of a giggling curiosity as to how long the filth might remain in peace, he sketched some slogans into the soot: "[Columbia President] Butler has no balls" and "Fuck the Jews." He also drew a cartoon of cock and balls, and a skull and crossbones.

Early one morning a few days later, Dean Ralph Furey appeared in Allen's room to find him in bed in his underwear with his arms around a nonstudent named Jack Kerouac. The Marquis de Sade could not have written a more perverse script; in the fall of 1940, Dean Furey had been the Freshman football coach who called Jack a pansy and hounded him because he didn't enjoy running on a broken leg. The truly wretched part of the scandal was that it was nonexistent; much to Allen's disappointment, there hadn't been any sex, and Allen's roomate Bill Lancaster confirmed it. Jack looked up to see Furey erupting, got out of bed, and without saying a word went across the hall to another room, dove under the covers, and went back to sleep. The next day he was banned from campus. Allen's fate was harsher. "Mr. Ginsberg," puffed Dean of Students McKnight, "I hope you understand the enormity of what you've done." Allen was ordered to stay from campus for a year, get a job, and see a psychiatrist, all of which he did, more-or-less. Burroughs was his psychiatrist, however, and Burroughsian values did not harmonize with those of the good Deans.

The sere barrenness of the Academy was virtually complete, and in that period the only faculty member to contribute much to Jack and Allen was Raymond Weaver, who taught a course in communications at Columbia, and understood that there more ways to interrelate than the straight-line, linear methods of his colleagues. His rich past included friendship with the great harpsichordist Wanda Landowska and years of residence in Japan; Weaver brought to his classes a touch of Zen and a vision of Gnostic wisdom that was unique. That spring, Allen brought Weaver a copy of Jack's first book, "The Sea is My Brother," and the professor recognized in it a kindred spiritual approach. Weaver responded with a reading list of ancient Gnostics, including Plotinus and the Egyptians. They were rare books indeed, as unusual as Bill's own shelf in the context of wartime America. Campus was irrelevant; the real classroom was 42nd St., a bar, Joan's big double bed sprawled with bodies; wherever Bill was, the talk was likely to be intriguing.

With the Western value system lying in ruins, fragmented by the enormity of the war, Burroughs searched through the shards and fragments of Manhattan culture for facts like the detective he had once been. But he was no Sherlock Holmes, whose evidence had been hard, physical, certain; his approach resembled more closely that of a popular American fictional contemporary, "Nero Wolfe," who probed intellectual and verbal facts so subtle as to be

nearly mystical, "Tenuous," as Wolfe said of his work, "to the point of nullity." Times had changed, and Burroughs and Jack first collaborated intellectually over a detective story modeled on another contemporary, Dashiell Hammett.

A few days after Bill had "stolen" Jack away from Self-Ultimacy, they were sitting in Riordan's, a bar on Columbus Circle. The radio news ended with the startling story of a flash fire at the London Zoo; the reporter concluded his tale with the phrase, "and the hippos were boiled in their tanks." Absurd enough to stimulate anyone, the phrase became the title of a Hammett-style novel Jack and Bill coauthored on Kammerer's death. Hammett was a real hero, and Allen took some marvelous pictures of Jack and Bill slipping about the streets in black hats and overcoats, the hard dry look of Hammett's main character "Sam Spade" in their eyes. For Sam Spade's world was like theirs, a place of black and white and gray, anything but "clean, orderly, and sane," whose resident author might have been Kafka: In The Maltese Falcon, Hammett's masterpiece, every major character lied. Spade was an "existential knight" who sliced through the fraud, the phoniness, the corruption, the lies, to the bonehard facts. He had no respect for cops or other bureaucracies, nor rigid patterns of search. "My way of learning is to heave a wild and unpredictable monkey wrench into the machinery." Nor did he respect social patterns; he played around with his partner's wife. Yet he did not

chop through the lies honorless; "Listen. When a man's partner is killed he's supposed to do something about it. It doesn't make any difference what you thought of him. He was your partner and you're supposed to do something about it." The quality of loyalty remained meaningful.[7]

What Jack and Allen and Burroughs and Joan reacted to was a sense of vision beyond the inane ravings of a war torn world. They wanted to capture Rimbaud's "Christmas on Earth," or the dark iron sensitivity that distinguished Hammett from the ruck of mysterians. There were other prophets to study. One day Bill pressed Oswald Spengler's Decline of the West into Jack's hands with the comment, "Eddify yer mind, me boy." The German's heavy tome was sneered at by the members of the American Historical Association, which was perhaps why their narrow, parochial histories made no impression on Jack, Bill, or Allen. But Spengler's attempt to transcend chauvinism and picture the world as history, a dynamic portrait of "things-becoming," fulfilled them. Seeking a logic of history that could answer questions of Being and justify prophecy of future development, Spengler had arrived at a cyclical-organic view of life. Fusing him with Nietzsche and Huxley, his three readers elaborated the beginnings of a cyclical theory of history that included seven categories. Their theory began with a natural, idealistic stage, moved through a logical Appollonian stage, lost itself in puritanical Protestanism, recovered through iconoclasm to

artistic recovery, and ended in nihilism and hedonism.

Spengler's recommendation to his readers at the end of his introduction was key: "And I can only hope that men of the new generation may be moved by this book to devote themselves to technics instead of lyrics, the sea instead of the paint-brush, and politics instead of epistemology. Better they could not do." Each man reacting as his personality dictated, Burroughs came away from Spengler with an apocalyptic vision of collapse. Years before, he and a friend at Harvard had written a lampoon of the Titanic called "So Proudly We Hail," which featured an orchestra playing the Star Spangled Banner, a captain in drag looting the safe, and a spastic paretic who chopped off the fingers of all the victims trying to get into his boat; the sinking of America. Sailor Jack, still a disciple of the rough-necked working class, interpreted Spengler's call as a retrenchment to his roots, to the plain people, the Fellahin. Though Kerouac was environmentally an urban intellectual, his soul was not in it.

Nor was he ever entirely committed to psychiatry, one of the other primary concerns at the 115th St. apartment. Years later he told a friend that rational psychotherapy was for him only another superstition, and he preferred the richer, deeper, sad peasant mysticism of Quebec Catholics. Or perhaps he rejected psychiatry because Bill, acting as the psychiatrist, got too close to his innermost fears. Allen

had the first hour with Burroughs, and Jack the second. Lying on the couch while Bill took a chair, they'd stare vaguely at the rising column of his cigarette smoke and free associate in the usual way. It was not Freudian analysis but Burroughsian, the impersonal, benevolent indifference of a friend. One day, after a long period of "analysis," Bill stirred in his chair, and in his gray nasal snort-thunk voice began to prophecy to Jack the future of his guilty attitudes towards Memere. He spoke at length, building a detailed, frightening picture of Gabrielle's starched white apron strings turned snake, guilt-worms coiled ever tighter, ever tighter around him. Jack was no fool; he understood his attitudes toward his mother. The entire mythology of his sexual guilts and his virgin-whore complex had been self-created and consciously verbalized to friends. But awareness does not automatically yield understanding and acceptance. Jack was moved and astounded at Burroughs' perception, and he was astonished, too, that Bill should make the effort to take notice of his life, but it did little to relieve his anxious suffering.

There was a subtlety to life at 115th St. that attached interest and meaning in the least occupation; they played charades, and it became a "conscious travesty," Allen said, of their personalities and America, as straw-hatted Jack became a bumptious hayseed, Allen in a bowler a sly Hungarian

hustler, and a fright-wigged Burroughs Allen's female partner in a confidence game. "Gee, I never seen no culture like this," burbled Jack, as they showed him "valuable heirlooms" for sale. "Yes, my dear," Allen would reply, "We haff very much culture. You vill stay here and learn." Occasionally, Jack and Allen would ride the subway, while Allen would peer through a hole ripped in his newspaper waiting for someone to notice him noticing them: "We were conscious of them, and it was an opportunity for them to be conscious of us being conscious of them . . . to provoke some sort of human consciousness, to bring eternity into the subway." "Supreme reality" was their watch word, but widening consciousness involved risks. The "Atomic Disease" was Allen's phrase for the zombie nature of contemporary reality, and also for the Benzedrine-induced paranoia that was beginning to consume Joan Vollner Burroughs.[8]

As spring turned into summer, the American and Russian armies met on the banks of the Elbe River, Mussolini and Clara Petacci ended up on meat hooks, and 500,000 New Yorkers surged into Times Square to celebrate the end of war in Europe. In mid-June, Allen received his draft notice, Burroughs drifted to St. Louis for a while, and Jack spent more and more time in Ozone Park with Leo and Gabrielle; the form of the 115th St. family had changed.

It was a weird and frustrating summer for Jack, compounded of emotional, financial, and artistic problems. A story he'd written about life at sea had failed to sell,

and some other magazine quicky pieces were also rejected. He decided to ship out for Europe in July, decided against it, then elected to work in a summer camp, only to become disgusted at the idea of scrubbing toilets for thirty dollars a week, and quit. Broke and floundering, he returned to Ozone Park. If all his problems had been monetary, though, he probably could have stuck out the ship or camp; what threatened him was much worse.

That summer Jack was driven half frantic by the split in his life between two worlds, the clean Lowell-Ozone Park axis of jobs and family and security, and the drug-hustler-homosexual scene of Allen, Bill, and Times Square. Though Jack was at base an enthusiastic heterosexual who lusted after whores and worshipped "virgins," he moved on the fringes of a shadowy sexual ghetto that disturbed him even though he barely participated in it.

Part quivering panic, part excruciating desire based on utter illicitness, part frenzy, few ideas affect American men more than that of sodomy. Keyed to the strength of his erect penis, of fucking, the conventional American male reacted to the idea of being fucked with a guiltily confused rejection. Homosexuality and its allied crime and drug scene in Manhattan tormented Jack that summer, left him paralyzed. Allen had "come out" to him the previous fall, thrust out of the closet by the shock of Lucien's imprisonment. Sitting in Hartley Hall, he had told Jack, "You

know, I love you, and I want to sleep with you, and I really like men." Jack groaned, covered his face with his hands, and moaned, "Oooooh, noooo . . . " Yet because of what Allen saw as his "mellow, trustful, tolerance and sensitivity," Jack didn't reject Allen, and he was, months later, still willing to share a bed--clothed--with his spiritual brother. Allen conceded that his approach had been crude and a bit selfish, "with all my harlequinade and conscious manipulation of your pity." It was a measure of the colossal guilt and repression of the times and Jack's own confusion about the worlds he tried to straddle that Kerouac could only be vague and oblique even in his letters to Allen. Burroughs Jack feared a bit, so it was Allen who received his nervous complaints about the double life of Ozone Park kitchen table and Manhattan furtive back streets. Ginsberg had been rejected by the draft after claiming homosexuality, and he landed that July of 1945 in the Maritime Service Training Center on Long Island. He wrote Burroughs at the time, "I feel more guilty and inferior by reason of faggishness than intellectualization will admit is proper." For Allen, the "mountains of homosexuality, Matterhorns of Cock, Grand Canyons of asshole" were a "weight on my melancholy head."

Allen established, and Jack accepted, a dichotomy between them. "We are of different kinds," Allen said. "Jean, you are an American more completely than I, more fully a child of Nature and all that is of the grace of the earth."

As a Jew, Ginsberg was "alien to your natural grace, to the spirit which you would know as a participater [sic] in America . . . . I am not a cosmic exile such as Wolfe (or yourself), for I am an exile from myself . . . I wish to escape from myself, I wish to obliterate my consciousness and my knowledge of independent existence, my guilts, my secretiveness."

Trapped in Ozone Park reading The Maxims of the Duc de Rochefoucald, Acquinas, Boethius, Rabelais, Pascal, and the Bible, Jack the "child of nature" had only concrete under his feet, tortured dreams about Lucien and self hatred for his attraction to the drug-sex netherworld inside his head. And, as he told Allen, he disliked the psychological self-centeredness, the repetitious analyses of sex, that seemed to preoccupy everyone. For Jack, his art was vastly more important than anything. Back came letters from Allen accusing him of rationalization, of pretending to be something he was not, of denying "Your double nature." Allen was correct; so was Jack when he argued that until he could express and reveal his divided psyche in a specific technique of art, nothing about him would make sense. Recalling an incident from the previous summer, he told Allen of a conversation he'd had with a woman about his search for a new method of writing, and of Lucien's interrupting them to ask what was wrong with the New Vision. At the age of 23, Jack was already quite positive that he had

the vision; he needed to discover the method that could translate ethereal clouds of thought into written words. As August passed, no resolution appeared, either in his writing or his emotional state. He waited.[9]

One resolution was available to the world: The nuclear sword cracked down out of the heavens on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and in the hideous light of atomic fire, World War II ended. At 7 P.M., August 14th, Harry Truman told America in an accent Joan and Bill had mocked all spring that he had received from Japan a message "I deem . . . full acceptance of . . . unconditional surrender." Two million hysterical New Yorkers surged into Times Square drunk with joy. Picking their way through the 5,000 tons of ticker tape that filled the streets, Jack and Bill were as liquored as the rest, but were outsiders; it was a serviceman's night. Burroughs came as Beelzebub in a crimson lined coat and Panama hat, and Jack walked silent beside him, savoring the ironies of companionhood with a satanic messenger on this day of deliverance. Seen in the blinding glare of a mushroom cloud, this new nation <u>was</u> hell as far as he was concerned. The war had left the federal government tripled in size and corporate assets doubled, with an accompanying increase in "efficiency" and a decrease in the visionary and human qualities that Jack prized. Surrounded

by a quarter of the city's population, Kerouac must have been appalled at the loneliness and sterility of the crowd. Blessedly, he was not alone. Ten blocks north on 52nd St., dozens of black Americans, soon to be followed by thousands of whites, were creating a new music out of the same frustrations and insights that Jack shared. More, black musicians like Dizzy Gillespie, Charley "Bird" Parker, and Thelonious Sphere Monk were creating a cultural revolution that would replace white big band music with a new beat called Bop.

Bop began innocently enough. The war had destroyed the big bands with entertainment taxes on dance floors, gasoline rationing which ended bus travel, and shellac rationing which made recording virtually impossible. Things were changing even more rapidly within the Afro-American culture; coming north en masse to enter the industrial system, more and more talented young blacks demanded to know why Jazz, the black art, was putting money only in white pockets. In 1941, Minton's, a reasonably priced, out-of-the-way club on 118th St. in Harlem, hired pianist Teddy Hill to organize a house band. Especially on Monday, the Apollo Theater's off night, young musicians began to drop by and jam, including Kenny "Klook" Clarke on drums, John Birks "Dizzy" Gillespie on trumpet, and Bud Powell on piano. By 1942, two more men had sat down to stay, a mystic goateed and shaded genius on piano named Thelonious

Monk, and a smiling extrovert-Saint named "Bird" Parker on saxaphone. Later additions included Max Roach and Miles Davis. With no white publicity, they had space to think, and the stage at Minton's became a scene of extraordinary creative experimentation; the jams weren't competitive, but shared attempts to make music more than entertainment, to make the music express what the times were about. Bop was Afro-American music doubled in speed, intensified in emotion, and made far more subtle in its treatment of the roots--rhythm. As Max Roach would later comment, "We kept reading about rockets and jets and radar, and you can't play 4/4 music in times like that."

Bop reflected the technical changes of World War II--greater speed and magnified complication--with perfect precision, but the music's social aspects were equally important. For the first time, black musicians saw themselves as artists to be respected, and more than that as a brotherhood of artists in revolt. Protecting themselves from American racism in general and the crudities of audiences in particular, the boppers developed a whole culture of restrained coolness that enraged bourgeois critics and older musicians but entranced Jack and many of his peers. Their language, full of "jive" and "cool," was distant and oblique. Their dress--berets, goatees, and glasses--seemed affected. And their drugs, usually marijuana, sometimes heroin, was sufficient alone to enrage all the squares. Above

all else, it was their withdrawn, somnambulistic intensity on stage--their refusal to talk or smile or shuffle, only play to the heavens--that made the usually generous Louis Armstrong accuse them of malice and the leading magazine of jazz, Downbeat, attack them as fanatics. As one student of Bop later wrote, "Jazz had broken itself free of the middle class world's social conception of what it should be."

Bop's audience--the hipsters--was at one with the music's contempt for the old style. John C. Holmes, a writer and later a close friend of Jack's, would come to argue that a Bop fan was "a different sort of person than a fan of swing or Dixie--with Bird you had to dig to know; your consciousness had to be at a different level of evolution . . . If a person dug Bop, we knew something about his sex life, his kick in literature and the arts, his attitudes towards joy, violence, Negroes, and the very processes of awareness." Jack had been hearing about Minton's since 1941, when his school buddy Seymour Wyse had let him in on what was happening, but he became involved with the music somewhat later, when the boppers moved downtown to 52nd St. It wasn't in Jack to be restrained and cool, but he was naturally hip, and he got along well enough with the hipsters to blend in. Listening to Bird, their heads nodding "yes," "Yes," the only affirmative act possible in a nihilistic world, the hipsters looked "like criminals" to Kerouac, but "they kept talking about the same things I liked, long outlines of personal experience and vision, night-long

confessions full of hope that had become illicit and repressed by War."10

Criminal or not, bohemia had become Kerouac's chosen nightworld. Here Jack followed Burroughs, who had made a new friend in a man named Herbert Huncke, and found a new vision in morphine. Sometime in the fall of 1945, Bill acquired several gross of morphine syrettes and a submachine gun. He mentioned this to a soda-jerk friend of his, Bob Brandenburg, who had a few underworld connections, and asked Bob if he knew anyone interested in buying the stuff. Around nine one night that week, Brandenburg took Burroughs to a strange apartment located on Henry St. in the Village and occupied by Herbert Huncke and Phil "Sailor" White, both of whom were interested in narcotics. It was a bizarre place, with black walls, a red ceiling, heavy drapes, and Aztec mosaics, all of which reminded Burroughs of a vulgar "chop suey joint." Huncke, a small, ferret-quick man with enormous dark brown Arab eyes that were always on the lookout for a hustle or the cops, wasn't too impressed with Burroughs, either. Herbert quickly dragged Bob aside, hissing, "Hey man, this looks like heat to me, get rid of him." After reassurances, Huncke and the Sailor sampled the merchandise. Having cooked up, tied up, and shot up, they helped Burroughs, who had never done "hard" opiates before, to do the same. Morphine hit Burroughs in the "back of the legs first, then the back of the neck, a spreading wave of relaxation slackening the muscles

away from the bones so that you seem to float without outlines, like lying in warm salt water." There was nothing in Bill's life at that point to stand in its way, and "by default," he said, junk soon became the entirety of his existence. He soon learned that a certain doctor on 102nd St. sold morphine script, that certain drugstores were easy for needles and droppers, that with the right connections, anything at all could be purchased at The Angler Bar on 43rd and Broadway. Briefly, Burroughs "worked the hole"--that is, picked subway drunk's pockets--with the Sailor. Their night would begin at eleven, when they'd roll uptown from Times Square looking for victims; Bill would read the Times next to the drunk while Phil reached behind to lift the wallet. One night they had to sap a light sleeper, and when his cut turned out to be three dollars, Bill quit. Marijuana dealing was too bothersome, so he settled on selling junk in partnership with an addict friend named Bill Garver.

Jack watched it all, absorbing every detail, gobbling Benzedrine until his hairline receded and his body became flabby, until he became so pale that Vicki Russell, a hooker friend of Huncke's, had to apply pancake makeup to his face so that he wouldn't feel conspicuous in the subway. Sick-carnival Times Square had been a haunt of Kerouac's for five years now, but he never appreciated it until he began to follow Huncke and Burroughs on their rounds, wide-eyed with fear and excitement. Huncke was an authentic Professor of Hip,

real, a street cat to the bone who'd steal the gold from your teeth if you sneezed; there was little meanness in him, but neither was there the slightest regard for anything resembling ethics. "Creep" was what the cops called him, the lowest of the low, and though there seemed no more unlikely a person to learn from, Jack, trembling with nerves, would follow Huncke into the Angler Bar for his lessons. When Dr. Kinsey looked for homosexual hangouts in New York, he went to the Angler and chose Bill and Huncke as two of the interviewees. But the Angler was no tea cup-elegant gay bar. Across the street was the Times Square Bar, aka "The Bucket of Blood." The Angler wasn't a great deal gentler, but it was conveniently at the center of the Times Square district.

For its component junkies, fags, hookers, cops, and observant fledgling writers, the Square was bounded on the north and south by 50th and 42nd Sts., and east-west by 7th Avenue and Broadway. Grant's hot dog palace on 42nd St. offered nickel hamburgers and huge dime hot dogs. Bus stations were major stalking grounds; the Greyhound at 51st St., the All-America Bus Terminal between 42nd and 41st, and the Dixie Station on 42nd. Huncke introduced Kerouac to the notorious Whalen's Drugstore on 7th and 47th, pointed out the cheap prostitute hotels that linked 46th and 47th Sts., and spent hundreds of hours with his eyes on the street from a booth at Chase's all night cafeteria, sipping coffee and stealing overcoats--and anything else available. Though Jack struck him

as an "All-American boy" and Allen as a "starry-eyed" idealist, Huncke didn't mind talking for such an attentive audience.

Bent over a beer at the Angler, he talked about one of his old friends, Elsie-John, a bizarre character who was a penny arcade hermaphrodite in Chicago. Elsie was six feet, six inches tall, with long, henna-red hair lying on an egg-shaped head. She, or he, had enormous deep blue eyes, green or blue eyelids, silver nails, a red painted mouth usually set in a slightly idiotic smile, a distinguished taste for heroin and cocaine, and generally appeared in the company of three Pekinese dogs. Even in Times Square there weren't many people quite so outré, but Elsie's kindred spirits were legion, and Jack roamed among the furtive dropouts of the Square trying to avoid moral judgments and appreciate their humanity.

His reading suited the atmosphere; that summer he had gotten drunk and stolen a copy of Louis Ferdinand Celine's Journey to the End of the Night. Floating on an exotic wave of Benzedrine, Jack transcended 42nd St. and entered, in his mind's eye, an unspeakably horrifying world whose main ingredients were shit, piss, vomit, mucus, boils, puss, and maggots. Celine's world, the life of Dr. Destouches, was all schemes and failure, charlatanism and guilt and death. Yet out of the odious corruption of that world came a peculiar vision which exposed the lies of modern life with

Destouches' compassion for his sad dying patients. Some of Celine resonated directly with Jack's own life--an upwardly mobile mother, sour working class father, a gloomy, nearly paranoid view of life. Yet it was the style that impressed Kerouac the most. Trotsky said of Celine that he "writes like a man who has stumbled across human language for the first time." He wrote as people talked, putting spoken language into print with his famous ellipses. Altogether his style was not linear but rather circular, detail building on detail in seemingly random order, the words elastic, slippery, almost diaphanous. Finally, his story was his own, an encounter with his own mind, nothing more nor less.

It was all too much for Jack, the Benzedrine and talk and horror, and in December 1945 his legs swelled with thrombophlebitis. Confined to bed in the Queens V.A. Hospital and surrounded by returned veterans, Kerouac had an opportunity to reflect on the chasm between his hip urban life and the values represented by the shabby apartment in Ozone Park where Leo and Gabrielle resided. As well, Leo was quite sick with stomach cancer, and around this time had to quit work. He and Gabrielle could not understand their son's almost neutral curiosity about the street, were appalled at the drugs and his "foreign ideas." They demanded to know why Jack couldn't get a good job, and were sure that Bill and Allen were going to get him into further trouble

A refugee from the 19th Century, Leo was wholly unable to comprehend this rushing new world of "Electro-Mechanical Brains" and atomic bombs. The labor struggles led by John L. Lewis in the spring of 1946 were an abomination to him as an honest working man. Nobody else understood the nation's changes, not Jack, not the New York Times. A February 1946 issue of Life featured horrifying pictures of suicided Nazi war criminal Dr. Robert Ley's brain being dissected in the interests of science. No answers there, either. Laying in the white hospital bed, Jack found himself thinking that "the city intellectuals of the world were divorced from the folk body blood of the land, were just rootless fools." He "began to get a new vision of my own of a truer darkness which just overshadowed all this overlaid mental garbage of 'existentialism' and 'hipsterism' and 'bourgeois decadence.'" When Jack got out of the hospital, he went home to Ozone Park to nurse Leo.

There is something horrible and cruel about watching your father die. How can the big strong man who threw you around with such power--wasn't it only last month?--wither and waste before your very eyes? It was his seed that helped make you, it is his flesh--your flesh, as well--that is being consumed. As he grows weak, perhaps you can grow strong. Surely no one can ever stare you down in quite the same way as your father; no other eyes are that powerful. But if you are a Jack, it can also make you weak, focus your guilts

on Memere, the survivor.

As your father dies you learn of pain and anguish and temporality, learn that death's honesty falls on us all with equal ferocity, that we are born to suffer and to die. Jack now had the true disillusionment forced upon him. Far beyond discovering that a hero was false--the normal sense of disillusionment--he discovered the life trap, that nothing ultimately mattered but the angel of death perched on his shoulder. That angel became Jack's greatest teacher of all, let him look into the grave and sense yin and yang, let him honor not only life humanistically, but death cosmically.

All the winter and spring of 1946 Leo grew gaunt and haggard, the flesh melting off his face and chest, sick cirrhosis spots blossoming on his hands. Around him was the stench of stomach cancer, the foul miasma of rotting, festering flesh. His belly bloated with fluid, and every two weeks a doctor came to drain him. Sometimes he'd be gay, sit up and talk, sip coffee and listen to the radio to find out how the Red Sox did. Sometimes he just sat and cried. He slept worse and worse, rising in the middle of the night to sit in his chair and hold communion with his parents, and God, and himself, asking them all why the world was so wretched, so full of pain, so cruel. "Life is too long," he said. Repeatedly he made his son pledge to take care of Memere when he died, and Jack swore an oath that he would.

One morning as Jack sat writing, he heard Leo's snores from the next room, and finished the paragraph. But the snores were his Papa's death rattle, and Jack left the table to see Leo's corpse and to note with wonder the printer's ink that still stained his father's hands. It was May, and now two of the Kerouacs were dead. They took Leo Alcide Kerouac home to Nashua, New Hampshire and they buried him, and Jack returned to Ozone Park, slipped a fresh blank piece of paper into his typewriter, and set out to write his tale in pain and glory, to redeem his life from death.[11]

CHAPTER VI

"A WESTERN KINSMAN OF THE SUN"

Because, more than anything, it is the road
And its turnings that is the traveler,
that comes back and remains unexplained
And even sits in the doorway and looks over
the hills and sees sunsets and calls you
to see them too; because it is the road
that the returned one has traveled who
travels, who goes and comes and remains;
perhaps it is the road who can, perhaps, explain
that it is the passion which does this, does not explain.

Robert Creeley

You road I enter upon and look around, I believe you
are not all that is here,
I believe that much unseen is also here . . .
. . . . . .
From this hour I ordain myself loos'd of limits and
imaginary lines,
Going where I list, my own master total and absolute . . .
. . . . . .
To know the universe itself as a road, as many roads, as
roads for traveling souls.

Walt Whitman

For much of America, 1946 was a year of orgiastic and voluptuous celebration, an ongoing postwar catharsis neatly symbolized by Jane Russell's aerodynamic brassiere in The Outlaw. Pensive in Ozone Park, Jack roamed from room to room mournfully singing Gershwin's "Why Was I Born?" Memere raised futile objections, but continued to work at her shoe factory job, supporting Jack while he wrote a book that he called "The Town and the City." Stylistically he rejected the New Vision aura of symbolic decadence and returned to his first love, Thomas Wolfe: Culled from notebooks that were already several years old, the work was underlaid not only

with his new insight into death but with the idealism of Goethe's autobiography Truth and Poetry, Kerouac's main reading matter that summer and fall. A dignified, gentle work, Truth and Poetry fit precisely the somber quiet of Jack's mood. Goethe had taken nine hundred pages to detail his first twenty-four years of life, and his charming tales of a romantic, fairy tale childhood full of princes, gorgeous costumes, gallant officers, and love soothed Jack's soul. Goethe calmly rejected satire and preached an affirmative love of life, and more, told Jack that all of his work was merely "fragments of a great confession."

Seated at the kitchen table, not seeing the wash flapping on the lines outside, Jack worked at his own confession. Concentration was easy, for distractions were few. Burroughs had fled New York after a narcotics arrest, and following a brief career as salesman for "Death County Bill's Tooth Tablets," he had settled on a farm in New Waverly, Texas, to raise marijuana for the New York market. Joan turned up in Manhattan that fall, but too much amphetamine sent her to Bellevue Hospital Psychiatric Wing. Allen reentered Columbia in September, and even had a publication to his credit; he had reviewed William Carlos Williams' poem "Paterson I" for the Passaic Valley Examiner, snidely urging the unwashed masses to put aside their crossword puzzles and read it. But that fall Allen was also heavily involved in drug experimentation, and because of that and Leo's death bed injunction against

Ginsberg, "that cockroach," Jack did not invite him for Thanksgiving dinner. Lucien's release from prison was the best news of the season, and he and Jack ended 1946 together with Vicki Russell and Celine, seeing the movie Crime and Punishment before they hit a series of Horace Mann socialite parties where they disappeared under the piano with purloined drinks and talked in the New Year.[1]

The calm was only temporary; around that time Hal Chase, a Columbia friend of Kerouac's who had lived in the 115th St. apartment, brought news that a young Denver friend of his was in town. The friend, a former inmate at the New Mexico State Reformatory who read Schopenhauer and wrote letters demanding to be taught about Nietzsche, had come to New York hoping to enter Columbia. Jack had seen the letters, and as he and Hal rode the subway to the apartment in Spanish Harlem he pictured a frail and poetic saint of the cells.

The door burst open and Neal Cassady stood naked before them, his well-muscled athlete's body radiating energy sun-like, a Nietzschean "sideburned hero of the snowy West," Jack thought. As they talked, Kerouac's eyes fixed on Cassady's bobbing, pumping head, with its broken, soft-ended nose, smooth high cheekbones and blue flirtatious eyes; everyone said they resembled each other enough to be brothers, and almost immediately they were spiritual partners, as Jack latched on to this "young jailkid all hung up on the wonderful possibilities of becoming a real in-

tellectual." After seven years of cynical East Coast sophistication, Jack had endured enough. Twenty-year-old Neal swept into his life like a West Wind siren singing freedom, excitement, kicks, a "wild yea-saying overburst of American joy," as Jack characterized him, who didn't complain or put down the admitted nastiness of the times but didn't care, enthusiastically flying after food and sex like a "natural man."

Neal's fantastic talk took Jack back to the excitement of Pawtucketville streetcorners, punctuating Kerouac's shy mumbles with "Yes!" and "That's right!" Cassady ordered his wife Luanne out of bed and into the kitchen with an unceasing flow of electric liquid persuasion: "In other words we've got to get on the ball, darling, what I'm saying, otherwise it'll be fluctuating and lack true knowledge or crystallization of our plans." Luanne was also of interest to Jack, a 16-year-old with curly auburn hair and a voluptuous body that made him horny. But it was Neal who captured Kerouac's mind, his imagination, and his heart, this young man whose ragged clothes fit perfectly, made by the "natural tailor of Natural joy," who could throw a football seventy yards, run a hundred yards in less than ten seconds, broad jump twenty-three feet, and masturbate five or six times a day, every day.

Ah yes. For Neal, as Jack said, sex "was the one and only holy and important thing in his life, although he

had to sweat and curse to make a living and so on," and Cassady, the man with more energy than anyone, devoted most of it to what he called "that thing 'tween them li'l ole gal's legs," a seemingly fearless man who had been stealing cars and getting laid at the age Jack played Shadow and jerked off. A hero full worthy of emulation had finally arrived in Jack's life.

Yet Jack was not naive about Cassady, and over the ensuing weeks as they held all-night beer and cigarette talks, he knew him as a brother-sufferer--as the brother, Gerard. Neal, whom Jack thought was born at about the same time as Gerard's death, seemed to fill the empty spot in Jack's heart. Cassady, with all the intuitive insight of the con man, asked Jack to teach him how to write, and although Kerouac denied that he could, Neal's blurted coax swept him away. "Yes, of course, I know exactly what you mean," gushed Cassady, "and in fact all these problems have occurred to me, but the thing that I want is the realization of those factors that should one depend on Schopenahuer's dichotomy for any inwardly realized . . ." Neal was like the true cowboy of Western mythology, generous and antimaterialistic, romantic yet misogynous at core, whose life above all rolled along opposed to the dread middle class words "responsibility" and "maturity." And oh how he suffered for his cowboy freedom, for his energy and drive were the product of deep self hatred, of a childhood wrought, as Jack later put it, of "a

million disorderly images of damnation and strangulation in a world too unbearably disgusting to stand." Over the coming years, the two brothers would share their histories, and piece by fragmented piece, Jack would puzzle over his brother's sad and lunatic past.[2]

Neal called himself the "unnatural son of a few score beaten men," because after a young childhood spent watching his older half-brothers systematically pound living hell out of his father for coming home drunk, at age six he went with Neal Sr. to live in Denver's skid row bum hotel, The Metropolitan. The elder Cassady was a totally ineffectual meek slug of a wino, a sad doormat for whom his son begged nickels for a bottle, pleaded for mercy from judges, and painfully helped home after Saturday night drunks. They shared their room with a legless misfit named "Shorty," who was usually gone when Neal awoke to go to school. As a first grader, Neal got himself off to class alone, his father still unconscious from the night before.

The seven year old boy washed up in a common bathroom stinking of vomit and filth, scrubbing behind his ears and neck elbow-to-elbow with sad old derelicts raping their faces in some forlorn effort to spruce up for downtown "high class" begging. For the Cassadys, breakfast and dinner were taken at the local mission, and they spent their mid-week evenings kibitizing cards at the Metropolitan's lounge.

On Saturday Neal Sr. usually managed to find work as a barber, while Neal lived in the movie theater next door, delighted with The Count of Monte Cristo, The Invisible Man, and King Kong. Life with father was weird but free, and Neal was unhappy when he had to return to his family in later school years--summers to be spent with Pop. While with his mother, he was regularly tortured by his brother Jimmy, whose favorite hobby was crushing the skulls of cats; Neal he only imprisoned inside a fold-in-the-wall bed, or forced to fight with other boys.

There was only one solution, and that was to run; at age fourteen, Neal Cassady discovered holy sanctuary behind the wheel of a stolen car. Along with sex, the speed and freedom of a moving car became his avenue of growth, giving him one place at least to breathe. Go. It didn't matter where. Just Go. Night after night he'd steal a car or pick up a woman. Or better still he'd organize a whole party and rush off into the mountains above Denver, free for the moment from being Neal the Drunkard's son. By the age of twenty-one, he'd stolen 500 cars, been arrested ten times, convicted six times, and spent fifteen months in jail. During one of his reformatory stretches, Neal was tormented by dreams of being like his father, so he began to read philosophy, and when he was released from the sentence at the age of fifteen, he spent as much time in the library as in his other main haunt, Peterson's Pool Room. Peterson's

gave him the first of his benefactors, a man named Jim Holmes, the hunchbacked wizard of rotation pool, a suffering saint who listened silently when Neal madly propositioned him with an offer to teach Jim philosophy if Holmes would tutor him in the finer points of eight-ball and the like. The lonely boy's attempted con worked, and Jimmy took him home, fed him, gave him a suit, and introduced him to his gang; in a few days Neal was its star.

His second saint was more worldly. Justin W. Brierly was a Denver high school teacher who, as Jack later told the story, once knocked on a door and had it opened by a naked, very erect Neal, then in the midst of screwing the maid. Brierly, who played sponsor to many young men, chirped, "My dear fellow, your ears aren't washed," sent him home and later to school, and introduced him to other young Denver men he'd gotten into his alma mater Columbia, including Jack's friends Hal Chase and Ed White. Chase, a blond, bisexual young hipster, had impressed Neal with his conversation, especially his enticing stories of college life in New York. Even Neal's studies in philosophy slowed when Hal remarked that "The poet is much more important than the philosopher." Replacing Schopenhauer with Rimbaud, Cassady stepped off the bus in New York City aflame with an artistic curiosity set to devour new experience in any form.

One of the first things he learned was how to smoke

grass. On January 10th, Jack took him up to a studio apartment in the East 80s to meet Vicki Russell and Toke, the patron saint of marijuana. Coincidentally, Allen was also present. Allen and Neal had met at the West End the previous fall when Neal first arrived, but then Neal had been unsure how much of Allen's "dark brooding eyes" was a con. This time, Neal, "the holy conman with the shining mind," locked gazes with Allen, "the sorrowful poetic conman with the dark mind," and they plunged into an intense, supercharged dialogue.

With what Allen called his characteristic "energetic efficiency," Neal, then working at the Hotel New Yorker parking lot on 34th St., planned to divide his nights three ways. Two evenings would be spent writing with Jack in Ozone Park, two nights in rapt intellectual conversation with Allen, "staring into each other's eyes," Allen later said, "finding out whether or not we bugged each other, what the limits were," and three nights rolling and tumbling with Luanne. Luanne soon decided that she had the lesser part of the bargain and returned to Denver, but even before that something very special had happened.

Late one night the traveling party ended up at a friend of Allen's tenement apartment on 104th St. There weren't enough beds, so Neal and Allen shared one. Trembling with desire, shame, and fear, Allen edged away to one side of the bed, only to have his mind spun upside down in merciful

relief when Neal in tender compassion reached over and pulled him back. He was the same age as Allen, and his warm, generous lack of inhibitions overwhelmed the nervous Ginsberg. Allen fell in love with him. It seemed to Allen a "total accident," since Neal was basically interested in women: Though Cassady's self-hatred included a masochistic streak, his sexual relationship with Allen, formalized with love vows a week later, came mostly out of a large compassion. Jack was "curious, envious, humorous, cutting . . . proud," of the liaison, and later compared it to Verlaine and Rimbaud--and to himself and Sammy Sampas.[3]

The trio of young men talked in bars, the parking lot, at home; high on tea, drunk on beer or racing on amphetamine, all three of them stood naked and hungry for intimacy before each other. By March 1947, Neal told Jack that he had decided to write a life history, and through Allen had a two page list of books and magazines that would have done credit to a very hip college's entire humanities program; the three most important books were Spengler's Decline of the West, Kardiner's Psychological Frontiers of Society and Korzybski's Science and Sanity, while Neal chose as general reading Djuna Barnes, Camus, Celine, Kafka, Joyce, Mann, Proust and Gide, among others. He felt he should be absolutely familiar with Baudelaire, Rimbaud, St. Perse, Rilke, Hart Crane, T. S. Eliot, Auden and Yeats.

On March 4, 1947, Neal got on a bus to return to

Denver, with Allen and Jack to follow when summer came. The trio was close; the previous evening Allen had talked, as he told his journal, "soberly (and severely) and straight to Jack a la Cassady--and it worked!" After sharing beans and hot dogs at Riker's cafeteria, they clowned around hiding their nervous love by taking pictures in a bus station booth, then cut up and shared the prints. Dressed in a new charcoal pinstripe three piece suit, Neal lugged his hot portable typewriter onto the bus with Chicago written on it and was off.

Their correspondence was as chaotic as their conversations. Days after Cassady left, Jack was giggling over Neal's slaverous description of his seduction of a school teacher--a fellow bus passenger--after four hours of the full brunt of Neal's overwhelming hustle. Jack called it "The Great Sex Letter" and was most impressed, though Neal scoffed at it as drunken ravings. Most of his letters, though, were encouraging, urging Jack to work on his novel "The Town and the City" and not give up, affectionately informing Kerouac that he felt whole and peaceful in his presence. By April, Neal was complaining that Jack wasn't interested in him because of his lack of verbal facility, that their relationship's cutting edge of frankness was being corroded by Jack's defensiveness. Still,

the letter ended positively.

As befitted lovers, Neal and Allen were more stormy with each other. In the first month after he left, Cassady wrote five times, beginning with a tortured cry of dependency and compulsive need, expressing an "almost paranoid fear of losing you Allen"; by the end of the month he had rationalized his bodily desire for Allen as a simple compensation for the intellectual gifts Allen brought to the relationship. Now he wanted to live with both Allen and a woman. Crushed, Allen fumed that he was a "dirty, double-crossing, faithless bitch." Neal explained and explained, but it wasn't until June that he told Allen of Carolyn Robinson, a woman he'd met in March. Carolyn was a Bennington graduate and University of Denver graduate student in Fine Arts, the product of a secure middle class family ensconsed in a restored ante-bellum Tennessee mansion; her father was a professor of Biochemistry at Vanderbilt. Blond and beautiful too, she was everything Neal was not. Yet he impressed her with his dignity, even clad in a t-shirt and suit. "Closer to relating to people totally" than anyone she had ever met, he was so aware of her welfare, so "considerate, conscientious, unselfish," that he flabbergasted her into love. He didn't bother to mention that he was married, and she discovered only much later that the love poem he read to her was actually written by Allen for him; his Don Juan talking eyes meant much more.[4]

At last it was July, and after a spring of reading books about the pioneers and mountainmen, of studying maps with infinite care as he traced the red line of Route 6 from Cape Cod to Nevada, Jack was ready to hit the road, to expose himself to the loneliness of vagabondage, to join Neal, to look for America. It was a strange land he crossed, a nation caught in change, relentlessly solidifying into a structure Jack would detest: America was on its way to being a solidly middle class, increasingly suburban country. It was of course another product of the war. Haunted by memories of the World War I bonus and concerned with a possible post-war depression, Congress had passed the "GI Bill of Rights," which turned out to be an astoundingly successful welfare program. It was not, however, a dole for sullen failures but grants for upwardly mobile middle class earners who came back from the war able to buy a home, set up a small business or go to college, learn a trade or get a respectable government job. The GI Bill was the crucible that formed the core of the post-war managerial and professional class. A general prosperity reached to the bottom, too, as the bottom income fifth of the nation increased its earnings by nearly 70%, the second fifth by nearly 60%, while the top fifth increased

at the rate of 20%. Four million, three hundred thousand veterans took out home loans, deserting Flatbush Avenue for the cookie boxes William Levitt was conjuring up on old potato fields in Long Island. Sales of Emily Post's etiquette book rocketed in the late 1940s, according to her, because "Money has changed hands."

But there was a price; prosperity brought with it social conformity, materialism, and a lock-step faith in "scientific progress." As in the previous post-war era, anxieties about change found a symbolic outlet--the extraordinary fear of communism that characterized the "Cold War" decade. Ultimately, the horrific "Red Image" of communism was a projection of the fears of further modernization. Soviet materialism v. American Godliness and communist enslavement v. American individualism were nothing more than the underside of America that was now rising, the soulless, mechanized Moloch that Jack, Allen, Neal and Bill were all fleeing. Moreover, those fears were sometimes manipulated by specific U.S. power groups; the Chamber of Commerce attempted to regain its tattered prestige with a booklet, "Communist Infiltration in the US," and by the time Jack stepped onto the road for Denver, a half-million copies had been distributed with tremendous press coverage. Much of the red baiting of labor which had resulted in the Taft-Hartley Act was a cover for anti-unionism Andrew Carnegie would have championed. The result was stasis. By

1947 every major magazine in America from the Atlantic to New Republic to the Partisan Review was rabidly anti-communist, comfortable with the hysterical analysis of liberal historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. that linked communism with the Jesuits. Members of both groups, he reported in Life, were fanatics in their cause solely because of social and sexual frustration.

Hammer-and-sickle Stalinists or red-white-and-blue Americans; there seemed to be no alternative to these two choices. In fact, there was at least one alternative, and that was Dwight Macdonald's Politics magazine, one of Allen's favorites. Macdonald was radically democratic, pacifistic and in favor of decentralization, opposing science, the warfare state, and the febrile notion of historical progress. Jack and Allen were kindred spirits, but all of the readers of Politics together could have lived in one large Manhattan apartment building, and they went unheard. Literary criticism conformed to the times, and the reigning authorities were the consciously reactionary members of the "Fugitive School," John Crowe Ransome and Allen Tate. T. S. Eliot expressed their view in this manner: "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality."[5]

Four incidents made the headlines in the summer of 1947, each of them symbolic of enormously powerful currents

in the society. Handsome Bugsy Siegel, organized crime's advance man in Las Vegas, was assassinated on June 20th by his erstwhile employers, but the investment of Syndicate money in "legitimate" enterprises went on apace. Industrialist Howard Hughes was embarrassed with fraud charges before a Congressional Committee in July; suave as ever, he rode out the scandal and continued to grow rich and corrupt government officials. Americans everywhere shivered when four thousand motorcyclists converged on the small town of Hollister, California, for the July 4th weekend. Bored, the cyclists terrorized the town by destroying windows and other property, the first youth cultural group since the hipsters to win the disgust of the middle class and the interest of the media, which shortly thereafter put out the movie The Wild Ones. Jackie Robinson, first of a wave of publicized black athletes, kept on stealing bases at Ebbets Field.

Meanwhile, Jack was cold, wet, and frustratedly discovering that the symmetric beauty of maps does not always harmonize with reality. Having decided to follow the perfect Route 6, he had taken the subway to 242nd St. and the trolley through Yonkers, then hitched to Bear Mountain, New York, and the highway west. It was no picnic; that area was astonishingly empty considering its proximity to New York, and he found himself standing in a chill rain with his new-for-the-trip open weave huarachas

soaked, night falling, and his westward progress nonexistent. "T'hell with it." He caught a ride back to New York and got on the Chicago bus. Hitching from Joliet, he passed the great stinking Mississippi, and crossed Iowa eating apple pie and ice cream in the company of the romantic lunatics known as truckers. For a while he had to listen to the truckers talk of cops; "They can't put no flies on my ass!", one said. Soon, though, the darkness would close in and all that would remain was the hammering roar of the engine and the white noise of the wind that cancelled out all else, leaving his eyes focused in the narrow tunnel of the headlights that guided his mind forward, out into the great void that was the land.

The road can free you, or imprison you. Jack grew. After a confusing, disoriented night in a train hotel, he discovered the other side of hitching, the frustration of standing for hours in a place like Stuart, Iowa, greeting those few cars going your way with a forlorn smile and an interior monologue that went something like: "Hey lady, I'm okay, c'mon, pick me up. Ahh, I won't rape you . . . damn. Hey man, please, I'll tell funny stories, I'll do anything. Screw you then. Well, at least I'm warm. [Car slows] Hey, great, thank God! [And speeds away] Ahhhhhhhh Fuck."

Lonely, Jack hooked up with a guy named "Eddy" in Iowa, and having passed Council Bluffs (the old wagon train

jump-off point now no more than "cute suburban cottages" to Jack) they went rolling down US 30 into Nebraska. Stopping in cafes, Jack was elated to hear cowboys laugh and tease waitresses, "Maw, rustle me up some grub before I have to start eatin myself raw or some damn silly idee like that." Deserted by Eddy, Jack waited through what seemed an eternity and then got the ride of his life in the back of a truck driven by two blond grinning Minnesota bumpkins on their way to the West Coast. Careening along through the mean Wyoming wind in the back of their pickup, Jack found a thousand laughs, some warming shots of rye whiskey, and a man named Mississippi Gene, who turned out to be a friend of an old sailing buddy. Cheyenne was a little depressing, for its "Wild West Week" struck Jack as a sad fraud, a shabby commercial con that was no replacement for the real thing. Drunk after his pickup attempt failed, he ended up spending the night in a bus station that might have been in Newark, but "for the hugeness outside" that enraptured him--that clarity and enormousness of horizon that does make Wyoming "Big Sky Country," the essence of America, the glorious promise of a free and Holy land, the sense of limitless possibilities for a free people. Hitching south to Denver, he kept telling himself, "Damn! damn! damn, I'm making it!", romantically imagining himself as "strange and ragged and like the Prophet who has walked across the land to bring the dark word, and the only word I had was 'Wow!'"

After two days in Denver, Jack finally caught up with Neal, who was then rather busily working all day, making love with Luanne and Carolyn in the evening and talking and making love with Allen--who had arrived the month before--all night. Allen's basement room, a sweaty-walled crypt with a bed, a chair, a candle, and an ikon, was their meeting place.

As Jack charged in, Neal looked up and effusively sputtered out a greeting --"Why, Ja-ack, well now--ah--ahem--yes, of course, You've arrived--you old sonumbitch you finally got on that old road. Well now--look here--we must--yes, yes at once--we must, we really must!"--but in the rush and fury of the visit, they never got a chance to really talk. In fact, Kerouac spent most of his time with Hal Chase's gang, which was then involved in a small social war with Neal, whom they considered a bum. Bob and Beverly Burford were Jack's main playmates, along with Chase and Ed White, and they partied all over Denver and then in Central City, a reconstructed mining town in the mountains west of the city. Burford was a tough guy, a budding Hemingway, and though he thought Neal was "a hood," he was impressed with Jack's journals. The visit to the Central City Opera was a great party, and while Jack missed Neal and Allen, who had remained in Denver, he figured they'd only have been out of place. They seemed suddenly like characters out of Fidelio, that night's opera, like "the man with the dungeon stone and the gloom, rising from the underground, the sordid hip-

sters of America, a new beat generation that I was slowly joining."

Back in Denver, Jack spent some time with his older friends, and despite the fact that he fell asleep when Allen tried to explain ambiguity and complexity to him, they were sweet and mellow with each other, and Allen later told him that "you redeemed yourself in my eyes." One lovely night, Jack went with Neal and his girlfriend Carolyn to a tavern and talked over the jazz on the jukebox, their conversation animated with wild facial contortions, vocal gymnastics, crazy gestures and flashing eyes. Carolyn liked Jack, was charmed by his laugh; as they danced together, he must have regretted his ideas of loyalty to brother Neal.

As it was, Cassady supplied him with a waitress friend to fuck, but after Carolyn's grace it was pretty depressing, and he sent to Memere for money to push on to San Francisco, where his old Horace Mann friend Henry Cru had a sailing berth for him. By this time, Allen had convinced Neal to leave Carolyn and take a trip to visit Burroughs at his ranch in Texas. Carolyn, meantime, headed for Los Angeles to try for a career in costume design. After only two weeks in Denver, Jack was back on the road in a bus headed for the Pacific--and disappointment. San Francisco on his first visit was cold, foggy, and bleak, and when he arrived at Cru's place in suburban Mill Valley, no sailing job was available.[6]

Jack's sharpest memory of Mill Valley would be laughter, for Cru's screaming shout was unmatched in the world, except by Mr. Snow, an elderly Negro man who lived next door. The unceasing brawls between Cru and his lady were not funny, however, and when Jack wrote a movie script for Henry to sell in Hollywood it came out hopelessly gloomy. Broke, he joined Cru and worked as a guard at a nearby complex that housed workers shipping to construction jobs in the South Pacific. Since most of his paycheck went immediately to Memere for safekeeping, his savings reassured him, but he abhorred his fellow workers, who had "cop souls," the sorts of fellows who delighted in shiny leather and buckles and in strolling about lasciviously fondling their night sticks. All Jack wanted to do was "sneak out into the night . . . and go and find out what everybody was doing all over the country." Stuck in Mill Valley with squabbles and the September rain, Kerouac grew frustrated; the only funny thing happening was when Henry defended his food raids on the barrack cafeteria with a quotation from President Truman: "We must cut down on the cost of living."

The mail from Burroughs' ranch in New Waverly was tantalizing. A silvery gray cabin plunked down in the middle of the East Texas bayou country, draped with Spanish moss and sprinkled with an occasional armadillo, it housed Bill, then doing three shots of heroin a day, Joan and Hunckle, who devoured between them a gross of Benzedrine

inhalers every two weeks, Joan's daughter Julie, Bill Jr., and their guests Neal and Allen. Absurdly high on the drugs and the fast ripening crop of grass, Bill would sit on the porch blindly firing off shots at a tree while Neal, Allen, and Huncke bemusedly roamed the swamps. Allen had a problem. Though he had earlier written Jack that he would be a Lover, and not a "sad prophetic jew," the daily letters Neal received from Carolyn were destroying Allen's hopes and his heart. By Labor Day he felt insane, his mind crumbling, his queer love for Neal now a weighty burden. "If you want to know my true nature," he wrote Jack, "I am at the moment one of those people who goes around showing his cock to juvenile delinquents." Neal's decision to join Carolyn had devastated Ginsberg. Allen even tried to build a bed to share with Cassady, but it collapsed like their relationship and he decided to take a leave of absence from Columbia and ship out to Dakar, Africa. Even Allen's parting from Neal was a frustration; having promised him a last orgiastic night in a Houston hotel room, Neal spent the early evening with a young retarded woman and Nembutals, and slept through the rest.

In Mill Valley, Jack's restlessness finally overcame his inertia in October and he decided to leave, first climbing Mt. Tamalpais, the magnificent hill in the center of Marin County due north of San Francisco, at whose base

lay Mill Valley. Mt. "Tam" was held sacred by the earliest Californians, the Indians. From its peak Jack could see the Pacific Ocean, San Francisco Bay, the Golden Gate Bridge, and the city of San Francisco itself; it was a magnificent center of holiness to which he would return. As the fog blew in off the ocean, he bowed his head in prayer, then went back down the hill and hitched to Saroyan's Fresno, where the free rides ran out. He caught a bus to Los Angeles, but it was to be no ordinary ride.

In a way wholly different from Neal's previous example, Jack found a lover in the next seat. Frail, slow, and a little dazed, her name was "Terry" and she was a Chicano. As broke and lonely as he was, she reached into his heart, not with words--she grew instantly nervous with his kinetic urban conversation--but with smiles and touches. Crooning "I love love" and harmonizing with the song "If You Can't Boogie I Know I'll Show You How," Terry joined Jack in a search for a cheap hotel room in bleak, awful Los Angeles, walking the streets with the blacks and the hipsters, the desert rats and the nature boys, smelling the grass and beer as they listened to the bop that floated out of the bars.

Running out of money, they decided to hitch to New York, failed, then took the bus to Selma, California, a small town near Bakersfield, to work in the fields and to get Terry's young son. The earth felt good to Jack as he picked cotton, a true Fellahin peasant at last, and though

he was exhausted, there was a profound satisfaction in the idea of his little family, the land beneath them and the sky above. Hopelessly inexperienced, he could earn only a pittance--barely enough for food--and as the nights grew chillier, it seemed too cold for a baby to live in a tent. Perhaps he was tired of playing peasant. In any case, he sent mother and child to her parents, hitched to Los Angeles, and armed with ten sandwiches, rode the bus to Pittsburgh, which was as far as his money would carry him. Hitching again and dizzy with hunger, he met a wraithlike hobo whom he called the "Ghost of the Susquehanna," a bearded old man continuously mad-babbling about food and headed to "Canady," until at long last a salesman picked Jack up and drove him to Times Square. Huncke was nowhere to be found, so he hit up a tourist for subway fare and went home to Ozone Park to discover that Neal, who had driven the marijuana harvest north from Texas, had gone to join Carolyn in San Francisco. Cassady and Kerouac had crossed paths somewhere in mid-America.[7]

Off the road in New York, Jack retreated undisturbed into the privacy of his writer-fantasy world, to a town he called "Galloway" in "The Town and the City," an inner reality that dominated his life almost totally during the winter of 1947-8. Letters from Neal were rare; one in Octo-

ber exulted in his love for Carolyn and apologized at length about missing him in New York, one in November described seeing Thomas Mann lecture, and one at Christmas spoke of his intense comradely love for Jack. A long letter in early January, the last for several months, analyzed a dream of Jack's which mixed Dostoyevsky's idiot symbol, with which Jack identified, Faust, and death among other things. Then silence. Burroughs remained in Texas, except for a brief, voluntary visit to the Lexington narcotics facility, Allen spent most of the fall in his home town of Paterson, New Jersey, and Lucien, unable to adjust to life outside prison, was hard to deal with. Open communication in the U.S. was generally difficult, as the crusading rhetoric of anticommunism used to defend the Marshall Plan that year had spawned a poisonous atmosphere that included the Attorney General's list of subversive organizations, repressive new visa and passport laws, HUAC's attacks on Hollywood and Labor, Loyalty Boards for all federal employees, and a wretched farce of a propaganda program called "Zeal for American Democracy."

No, it was better to stay in the world of his own artistic creation, in Galloway, a town "rooted in earth, in the ancient pulse of life and work and death," the home of the Martins, a family of bounty, of life and love and emotion, of love. After two years of struggle, Jack finally caught fire on his 26th birthday--March 12, 1948--with a 4,500 word day that exalted him. Seated at the Ozone Park kitchen

table Kerouac became bard, elegantly singing of the glee and honesty, of the "wild self believing individuality" of his childhood Lowell America, of family and closeness and affection; more, he became Jeremiah, and sorrowfully chanted of the family's collapse under the pulverizing weight of war. "The Town and the City" was many things. It was of course autobiographical, recounting his own story: The trips to Rockingham Park, the romance with Mary Carney, the Lawrence football game, Columbia, Kammerer's death (suitably altered), and Leo's death. It fulfilled the fantasy desires of his childhood. He moved the Kerouacs across the river to a better neighborhood, gave himself three sisters--Rosie (patterned after Vicki Russell), Ruth and Elizabeth--and created five Martin boys, Joe, Francis, Peter, Charley, and Micky, all elements of himself. Joe was a swaggering truck driver, Francis a snotty, brilliant intellectual, Peter a romantic young football player.

Yet transcending fantasy or autobiography was a vision of childhood, of Lowell, America, a reality centered on family solidarity and on women, for Memere as earth mother reigned over every sentence of his book. "The depth of a woman's heart is as unknowable as that of a man's," Jack wrote, "but nothing like restlessness and feverish rue ever abides there. A man may spend the night tracing the course of the stars above the earth, but the woman never has to worry her head about the course of the stars above the

earth, because she lives on the earth and the earth is her home." In sweetly symphonic tones, Kerouac depicted children's follies--a broken window, a bully--and how big brothers and sisters rescued their younger siblings. Francis, the gloomy one, might see the night as "all merciless and hopeless, the one that kills you in the end," but his sour spirit bowed to more generous sentiments: "A child, a child, hiding in a corner, peeking infolded in veils, by swirling shrouds and mysteries, all hee-hee, all earnest and innocent with shining love, sweeter than a bird, pure, the child, unknowing, yet best known, godly all-knowing, the child crieth--'I see you.'"

And it all shattered. As Papa Martin watched his "family falling apart . . . they talk[ed] of war." Plucked fragment by fragment out of his own life, Jack's story told "the whole legend of wartime America itself, a picture upon which was written the great story of wandering, sadness, parting, farewell and war." Exhausted mothers with children in their arms waiting in train stations, Detroit factories, the Pentagon, boys in uniform, children sitting much too late in a big city park; the images swelled and vanished, leaving tiny traces in the reader's mind. George Martin fell sick and Peter nursed him. Charley died at Okinawa. Liz' baby was stillborn, and in her grief, Liz divorced her adoring husband.

In the end, life returned from the city to the land,

and the living gathered in "Lacoshua," New Hampshire, for George's funeral, until only the closing image remained--of Peter leaping into a truck and going on the road. On September 9, 1948, the book was done, all 380,000 words of it. It was two years of effort, of keeping meticulous records of word count progress, of an afternoon's sleep and five and ten and sixteen hours a night labor. He had given everything to his book, to the point one night that spring of going into the backyard, thumbing a hole in the dirt, dropping his pants, and trying to mate with the earth, to drive his penis into the ground, to truly know life from his head to his cock as it banged into the mushy cinders of Ozone Park. His first reaction to the book's completion was natural; he second-guessed himself, wondering if he should have worked the last paragraph differently, if . . . There was no need. He had sung as sweetly as his master Wolfe, but Jack's book was also informed with an historical consciousness keyed to actual event that lent it a measure of profundity beyond beauty.[8]

Allen, poor dear sad Allen, saw the manuscript first. He was "astounded by its depth," and in fact "felt that all the turmoil and frenzy of the last five years had been somehow justified: Because I saw expressed in his novel a peace and knowledge and solidity and--say, a whole recreated, true and eternal world--my world--finally given permanent form." Art had redeemed life. Jack's novel had

come at a crucial time for Allen, perhaps saved him. Still distraught over Neal, Ginsberg had spent a horrible winter consumed by thoughts of failure, with the feeling of being "the only eccentric dope in a world of mechanical supermen." He'd haunted gay bars in the Village, longing for death yet afraid of suicide. On one of Jack's visits to his East Harlem apartment he had pressed Kerouac sexually, so hungry for love that he was more than willing to plead, to grovel. Wanting Jack's hand one way or another, he even followed him to the subway stop and begged him to "Beat me up . . . do anything you like . . . anything!" Shaken, Jack escaped past the turnstile and left, despite the charity and patience Allen had attributed to him. The elder brother knew too well the causes of Ginsberg's instability. Over the previous year, he had accompanied Allen on several visits to his mother Naomi, had talked at length with the woman whom the Director of Pilgrim State Hospital wanted to give a prefrontal lobotomy, the haunted lady who wrote her son, "the wire is still on my head, and the sunshine is trying to help me. It has a wire department, but the wire that's outside my head, the sun doesn't touch."

Jack also sympathized with Allen's intellectual torments, for Ginsberg too was seeking a style and form that would express his art. Allen had written two poems in the past year--"Denver Doldrums and Dolours" and "Dakar Doldrums"--but dismissed them as "hallucinations" full

of contradictions "disguised with apocalyptic statements."[9] Cezanne and William Carlos Williams had cracked his head open with ideas about "petits sensations"--the mind's eye gap between words--and the use of colloquial American language, plain speech. But he wanted to be a "great intellectual poet, like Auden, or Dante," and dreamed of writing perfect love sonnets. When Allen put down "The Town and the City" he picked up his pen and wrote what he later said was his first good poem. He also began to write letters plugging the book to Lionel Trilling and Mark Van Doren, his old Columbia professors, assuring Trilling that it was "monumental, magnificent, profound." Trilling, on meeting Allen on campus, flipped a quarter in the air--so Jack later told the story--and told Allen, "I'll bet you it's no good." Van Doren, for whom Jack had strong filial respect--he seemed moral, like Dickens--sent him to the distinguished critic Alfred Kazin, but a June meeting with the author of <u>On Native Grounds</u> was cancelled when Jack had to go out of town. Nin, who had by then remarried, had just had a complicated Caeserian delivery of her son Paul, and Jack had accompanied Memere to visit Nin in the hospital in North Carolina. Charles Scribner's Sons--Wolfe's publisher--got "The Town and the City" first, but rejected it. Scribner's was the first of many politely negative letters Jack was destined to receive about his work.

Jack's concentration on the last stages of his book was rocked in late June with a letter from Neal, the first in many months. Contrary to Jack's suspicions, Neal hadn't been in jail. Things were much worse than that. Neal began his letter by explaining that all of his previous attempts to write had resulted, by virtue of his madness, either in maudlin pleas for help or unadulterated lunacy. Sunk in agonized despair, he had ridden the near edge of suicide for months, zooming his car across busy intersections at fifty miles an hour hoping to be hit. On his twenty-second birthday, February 8, 1948, Neal sat for fourteen hours in the back seat of a car, dissolved in sweat and nausea, plagued with fear, unable to pull the trigger of the silver revolver he held at his temple. In March he drove to Denver, and tried to freeze to death at the Continental Divide, but grew too cold and quit. Things got even stranger late that month, when Carolyn informed him that she was pregnant and opposed to an abortion. Seized with some lingering respect for life, he drove straight to Denver, crossing the Donner Pass without chains, got an annulment for his marriage to Luanne, and returned to San Francisco March 31st after forty-six consecutive hours of driving. On April Fool's day he and Carolyn were married; miraculously, he managed to be on

time and even remembered to bring a corsage.

Allen was hurt and bitchy. "The idea of you with a child and a settled center of affection--shit," he wrote his former lover. Angry, Neal wrote back suggesting that Allen congratulate him on his marriage, as he would, perhaps, on the purchase of a car. But to Allen, marriage and family were a cop-out, a bourgeois relinquishment of the sacred duties of a visionary artist. To Neal, artistic duty had nothing to do with him anymore, was "Bullshit . . . I can't realize or express [anything]." In July he even suggested that Allen not write, though both ignored the remark. Jack received a very different letter, for Neal told him that this child would be his fifth, and he would keep and raise it. Somehow the growing mound of life in Carolyn's belly renewed his faith, because the letter closed with an electric flash of old-time Cassady enthusiasm for a new idea--a ranch commune that would house the Cassadys, Jack and Memere, Allen, Jim Holmes, GJ Apostalakis, Huncke, and more, nine family members with room for at least nine first-cousin visitors for a day or a week or a year. By July, Neal was opening his letters with giggling doggerel, outlining how long it would take to collect the necessary funds, assuring Jack that it was all hard cold planning and not raving enthusiasm. Their goal was not some 21st century commune. Both men revered the family, and in fact they would both suffer endlessly in guilty horror for being

unable to live out the idea; they simply wanted to expand the nucleus, return to the traditional extended family, share their lives and the land, because "I just don't like the idea of everyone living in separate houses," argued Neal, "and having to go somewhere to see a friend." Carolyn was dubious, but they began to save their money.[10]

Years later, Jack would comment, "By 1948 it had taken shape--a year when we'd walk around yelling hello and talk to anybody who gave us a friendly look," and he probably had that summer's July 4th weekend in mind when he wrote it down.

Saturday, July 3rd, was hot and sweaty, and those who could afford it had fled Manhattan to Fire Island or the Hamptons; those who could not escape the inferno simply partied. Taking a break from the "Town and City" writing ordeal, Jack joined Allen for a bash at Russell Durgin's, a Columbia student and Ginsberg's friend. It was a memorable affair, because Kerouac made a new and enduring friend, an angular young man named John Clellon Holmes. Holmes was four years younger than Jack, but seemed a bit older and more stable, perhaps because he was married. A cerebral, analytical Yankee, he was also a writer, and when he read Jack's book, which a mutual friend named Alan Harrington handed him packaged in a beat-up Doctor's black bag, he was thrilled. Summoning up

his urban critical rhetoric, he felt the book was "too lyrical," and "needed structure," but he gloried in the compassionate feeling for life that leaped off the page. Shortly after that he read some of Jack's journal notes and was mindbroken; they served as a major catalyst for him, warning of both "the potential and costs of the vocation" of writing. They were so terribly different, the Canuck and the Yankee. Holmes was consistent, even, a bit dry, while Jack was easy with his own contradictions, impulsive, seeking the perfection and holiness of individuals while believing--still a good Catholic--that life was flawed. Holmes was a liberal, and saw the dark side of individuals even as he held to the faith that life could be made subject to progress.

As he stood on the sidewalk buying beer for the party, the t-shirted Kerouac struck Holmes as a younger brother to the workingmen clustered around the bodega, his heavily muscled thighs, neck and forearms, his excited sensitivity to the surrounding street scene, the uncool, unchic "purity of [Jack's] emotion" that concealed nothing marking him off as different from the New Yorker-Partisan Review sort of writer; yet it was obvious to John that he was "going to some serious fate." Instantly they were friends, and Holmes' 4th floor apartment at 681 Lexington Avenue between 56th and 57th Streets became Jack's midtown headquarters on his visits from Ozone Park, the scene of all-night talk marathons, considerations of the lit-biz, of his heroes Dostoyevsky, Wolfe, Celine,

Rimbaud, and Whitman, of Holmes' beloved D. H. Lawrence, of Balzac, the great French story teller Jack was then reading. John was a Dixie music fan, and when Jack heard about that he made John buy the "simple" Dizzy Gillespie's "I Can't Get Started" and Bird Parker's more advanced "Koko" as the first of his lessons in bop. Months later he grabbed John's arm in his quixotically charming way and dragged him off for another lesson at a certain jukebox on 125th St. where he played Willis Jackson's "Gator Tail," a musical sex piece complete with semen squirt-notes at the end.

Their conversations ranged widely, Jack matching Holmes' "solemnly radical undergraduate" political discourse with stories of wild kids, junkies, musicians, sailors, con men, and teenage Raskolnicks. He raved for hours about "New York migraine liberals and intellectuals," proclaiming ad nauseum that everyone should stand "naked on a plain" in natural beauty. Holmes mentally dubbed him the "tramp transcendentalist" when he'd excitedly point out a beautiful woman, crying, "Look at that hair! Now that's the kind of girl you never find in New York. She's like one of those chicks working in a lunch cart on the highway, a real woman. Right?" Always Jack's talk returned to the idea of buying land; never happy where he was, Kerouac could make profound sense only of the idea of sinking new roots in real soil.

Jack wasn't the only new friend Holmes made at the July 3rd party; bouncing around the gathering with a glass of

beer in his hand, Allen looked like an "inquisitive dormouse with black rimmed glasses" to John, full of awareness and delight, asking the most preposterously direct questions--"Does your wife approve of you?"--with a laugh that assuaged the effrontery. Ginsberg liked Holmes, found him "sweet and generous," but a little too calm and sensible, a bit too rational, because around that time Allen experienced a catastrophic mystical visitation that would direct his life for the next fifteen years, hurling him as never before into a visionary quest whose simple message was "widen the area of consciousness."[11] Lonely and depressed in his East Harlem apartment, Allen had been reading St. John of the Cross and William Blake, then jacked off. The semen still dripping across his belly as he gazed out the window, he suddenly heard a voice--William Blake's voice--reciting the poem "Ah Sunflower."

> Ah, Sunflower! weary of time,
> Who countest the steps of the Sun,
> Seeking after that sweet golden clime
> Where the traveller's journey is done . . .

Squirming shocked on his shabby bed, Allen thought at first, "This is what I was born for," then, "never forget, never renege, never deny." His "body suddenly felt light, and a sense of cosmic consciousness, vibrations, understanding, awe, and wonder and surprise." For Allen, "it was a sudden awakening into a totally deeper real universe than I'd been existing in." "The Sick Rose" followed. "O rose, thou art

sick! / The invisible worm / That flies in the night, / In the howling storm, / Has found out thy bed / of crimson joy, And his dark secret love / Does thy life destroy." When he heard this, Allen felt that his old life was truly destroyed. Over the next few days, kindred experiences boiled up, and then--too threatening--were repressed. But his way was set. "Dreamlike and white, arden-esque," "the other world"--the mystical world--had become for him the "only valuable thing, the only possession, the only thought, the only labor of worth or truth." As he wrote Neal, he was now truly a Myshkin, the sorrowful saintly Idiot, since he had lost control of his mind, and "seen the Nightingale at last." He told Jack that "We are inexistent until we make an absolute decision to close the circle of individual thought and begin to exist in God."

Jack thought Allen was going insane, but that alone was interesting, and as they all sat in John's apartment that fall of 1948, they listened as Ginsberg balefully lectured on visions, God emanations, and madness. Then Jack would counter with his own discourse--that life was a divine and beautiful and impossible mystery, something he occasionally hated but never rejected.[12] What he did reject was the shabby middle class liberalism that was then running America. Harry Truman was short, tough, and honest, just like Leo, and though Jack respected him as a man, Truman's Cold War politics disgusted him. In the wake of the war, a majority of liberals had re-

jected the New Deal idea of government as a force backing the people in conflict with business interests, and replaced it with a view of government as compromise, a consensus of organized interests that included conservative labor, and attempted reform through economic growth, not redistribution. Truman presented himself as a liberal, but the archreactionary Robert Taft backed liberal housing programs while Harry used the Taft-Hartley act to break strikes eight times in 1948 alone, then red-baited Henry Wallace and the Progressive Party into oblivion. Truman's amazing victory at the polls in November of that year was not personal but the success of the New Deal coalition, a reflection of the basically liberal consensus that reigned. But the people were excluded from the decision making, were hustled; they cheered the Marshall Plan to feed starving Europeans, never knowing that the U.S. sent guns and not butter to Greece.

Truman's communist-devil rhetoric fostered an "illusion of omnipotence" for the U.S. over the world, and when that bubble burst, the collapse of the illusion, as one historian put it, "fathered the myth of conspiracy." That summer of 1948, Elizabeth Bentley and Whittaker Chambers had joined Louis Budenz of Notre Dame in their cries of Communist infiltration in Washington. In December, Alger Hiss was indicted for perjury. The following year China would "fall to world communism" and the Soviet Union would possess a nuclear weapon. Raging anticommunism clawed at American culture and disemboweled,

for instance, American films; nearly one third of them had dealt with serious social themes in 1947, but in 1952 it was one-eleventh. The fearful times demanded a bland popular art.

Jack and John responded by avoiding modern films, getting stoned to sit in the Beverley Theater under the Third Avenue El and watch W. C. Fields and Charlie Chaplin. They were too bright, however, to be able to use the out that most of their fellow citizens took. Shaken and nervous, Americans in 1948 clutched the simple solutions of Dale Carnegie, How to Stop Worrying and Start Living, Joshua Liebman, Peace of Mind, and Norman Vincent Peale's A Guide to Confident Living to their hearts and the best seller lists. Confused, Americans wanted to know why the world was in such a mess. How could such horrors as the communist imprisonment of Eastern Europe and China take place if their country was as righteous, as strong, as Harry Truman said? Bitterly, the right wing of the Republican Party offered a solution; the threat was not communism outside the U.S., but within.

All of this was meaningless to Jack. In a beery conversation one night in November, John had railed at him for his lack of concern with politics, with the starving displaced persons of Europe or the exploited workers of the American South; in short, for not being a liberal. Jack went home, sobered a bit, and then wrote a passionate post card defense of his feelings, arguing that he could not vicariously agonize

and sigh over the fates of d.p.'s through Max Lerner's column, for that was self indulgence rather than a true grieving. He could accept the notion of political action, but not middle class liberal sentimentality and verbal handwringing. Liberalism was abstract, vicarious, unreal; Jack's private politics were emotional and from two directions.

He was obsessed, enraged, with a sense of America being debauched by the clanking, alienating horror called the modern new industrial state. But his rage was cut with a sense of Dostoyevskian suffering and guilt, for he felt that the American citizen's complicity with these modern horrors went far too deep to be "solved." They were not issues--"Issues," he'd say with a curling sneer, "Fuck issues"--but sins, and for that only penance was possible. Two years later he would mentally vomit at the exploitation of Hiroshima he saw in John Hersey's book by that name, and he told Holmes such exploitation happened because we had lost our humanity. His attitudes bewitched John, who saw it as a kind of "American existentialism," capable, as with black culture, of great spiritual radicalism. Having crossed the U.S. with a mind thirsty for sensation and experience, Kerouac had an enormous sense of breadth, of the limitless possibilities of the children fortunate enough to be born in such an astonishing place, yet he, really the only member of his little group that was the product of the close connections of a community, could only see the light of life in the eyes of brother outcasts, the

slinking hipsters who knew.

Painfully trying to describe his cultural mindset to John one night in November 1948, he said, "It's sort of furtiveness . . . with an inner knowledge there's no use flaunting on that level, the level of the public, a kind of beatness . . . a weariness with all the forms, all the conventions." Their conversation circled on, picked up on the idea of generations, something Jack's roots in old Lowell spoke to, as well as the "Lost Generation" literary concept. "You know," Kerouac said, then snickered and erupted into a Shadow "Mwee hee hee hee hee haaaa" laugh, "I guess you could call us a beat generation."[13]

Jack's moods fluctuated all fall. The slow and humiliating process of selling his book disgusted him, and he envisioned himself as a sad Samuel Johnson imprisoned in the sticky-shallow prison of Madison Avenue. Alfred Kazin read Jack's book in October, but nothing happened immediately. Kerouac took a few classes at the New School, including one from Kazin on the Transcendentalists, but the experience was fun largely because of the $75.00 a month G.I. benefits he got, as well as the glorious spending spree occasioned by each semester's book allowance; he and John would go and raid the wonderful 4th Avenue Greenwich Village used book stores and fill cartons with their loot. Early in October Neal wrote to tell

of the birth of his first child, Cathy. Cassady was tremendously mellowed by fatherhood, and the letter not only demanded that Jack come to California immediately, but related a vision of Neal's love for brother Kerouac, of how beautiful he felt his brother was. As Neal told Allen, he felt "pure" and wise. He'd also begun to learn the saxophone, since he was convinced that he could never really communicate with the written word.

Words were still Jack's medium, and in early November he attempted a new method of writing. Churning out 1,500 words a day about Neal and his experiences on the road, Jack looked for a method that would show greater freedom than he'd had with "The Town and the City," and by Thanksgiving he'd written 32,500 words. It was all very experimental--he saw it as first draft only--and it left him feeling hollow and uncertain, quite different from the holy feeling he'd gotten from the first book. As December grew colder, his mood grew more depressed. He felt distorted and ugly, partly because the book hadn't sold, partly for other reasons. The adrenalin rush of creativity had washed away to leave him flat; he told Holmes, "Well, I've decided I wrote it because I wanted fame and money and . . . love; not for any sterile artistries. I was just wooing the world with it, being coy." Almost embarrassed by his openness, Kerouac grew more abrupt and concluded, "Why should you fool yourself, John? I'm feeling geekish because the world isn't interested in my clumsy valentine." A

sulfurous letter to Allen in mid-December focused on "geekish" as well. Jack accused Allen and Burroughs of making him geekish, of forcing him to walk the tight rope of modern consciousness. Jack shrieked at poor Allen that he loved and hated him, and would go mad, and give up, that all he had left to believe in was food, sex, and the charming joy of Dickens.

Allen retorted that he'd never have become geek if he hadn't already been a "fallen angel," that "the abyss is more real than present flesh or future fancy"; after years of Allen trying to match Jack's joy, it seemed as if Jack was coming to resemble Ginsberg as a twisted, tormented soul. Both men also had their mind on Neal: Vague rumors--a cryptic note on a postcard--had reached them reporting that Cassady was coming East in what Jack assumed was a stolen car. As Christmas approached, Jack would relax from the agony of writing and think of the land, imagine it rolling West, think of Neal, because out there on the last edge of the continent Neal symbolized all that remained of America to Kerouac. Finally Jack gave up and fled the city, joining Memere in a trip to Nin's place in Kinston, North Carolina, for the holidays.[14]

Christmas passed peacefully until, a few days later, there was a thump on the door. The incongruities were mind-boggling. Standing in Nin's doorway, her staid Southern in-laws peering over his shoulder, Jack looked at Neal Cassady. Neal grinned, rubbing his belly under the skimpy t-shirt--his

only top in the cold, late-December weather--jumping around and talking endlessly about Everything. A new season had come. Neal had swept across country and back into Jack's life after a year and a half, and for the first time they would travel together, living by Blake's dictum: "The pathway to wisdom lies through excess." Jack knew that he needed more experience to make his art work, and like Rimbaud, he followed Neal into dissipation on principle, into the systematic derangement of the senses that would destroy the old patterns and leave him naked and reborn. Grass, speed, the roadhigh drug itself, the means didn't matter; it was time to get back on the road.

All fall Cassady had been a more-or-less model husband, working on the railroad, playing with the baby. But a negative November referendum on the "Full Crew Law" had cut his work hours and eliminated the ranch commune dream. Carolyn had suggested painting to combat his depression, and he tried. But in his rigid attempts to stay straight with his family, all he could produce were bands of uniform colors, lines as precise as a coloring book. It was a car, of course, that snapped Neal's resolves of virtue, a beautiful dark silver 1949 Hudson Hornet in a showroom on Larkin Street. Lusting after the auto, Neal conned his old buddy Al Hinckle into marrying his girl friend Helen so that with her money he could drive them to New York on their honeymoon and get Jack. His whirlwind energy pulled it off, and fleeing Carolyn and the baby's

tears, he whipped out onto the road only to discover by Arizona that Helen didn't have very much money, and wanted to spend what she had on motels. Motels! So they deserted her in Tucson, then plagued with lewd memories of Luanne, they charged north to Denver and after a few hours of frantic persuasion captured her and took off for North Carolina.

Neal's con continued, reaching out to involve Memere. They'd move some furniture from Nin's place to Ozone Park for her, leave Al and Luanne there and return to North Carolina and bring Memere back to the City. Marriage had pitched Cassady over the edge into never-never land, and Jack sat stoned and mindblown, listening to Cassady's frantic jabber through the East Coast night, because according to Neal, "Everything is fine, God exists, we know time. Everything since the Greeks has been predicated wrong. You can't make it with geometry and geometrical systems of thinking. It's all this"--and Neal stuck a finger into his closed fist, creating a symbol of oneness--"Now!" He was right, they knew the sweet rush of life and Go!, measured only by the flying beat of Wardell Gray and Dexter Gordon's screaming new bop song "The Hunt," their trip theme song, and "Now is the time and <u>we all know time</u>!" Covering around 1,500 miles in under 36 hours, they returned to New York and plunged into a New Year's Eve party that lasted three days, Neal greeting 1949 in a jock strap and kimono, rolling joints and yelling "That's right, That's right!" before they floated quickly out the door to hear George Shearing wail at Birdland.

Not everyone approved. The deserted Helen Hinckle had wound up at Burroughs' place in Algiers, Louisiana (having lost his Texas driver's license for drunk driving and public indecency, he had found the Lone Star State "uncool" and moved), and though Bill found her a perfect guest, he was ragingly firing off letters and telegrams to New York that denounced Hinckle. In his mad way, Neal tried to do right by Carolyn, sending her fifteen dollars on January 10th as he ordered her to pick up the baby and come to New York. Allen was still disturbed, and greeted Neal with a slow, sad warmth. Ginsberg was a copy boy with A.P., and had even managed to graduate from Columbia, though neither fact gave him pleasure; when he spoke to Neal, it was about his gloomy poem "Dakar Doldrums" and Hart Crane and various bridge jumping fantasies, asking Cassady, "Whither goest thou?" The three of them did manage one friendly sharing, and together they concocted a poem called "Pull My Daisy," which neatly reflected the surreal atmosphere: "Pull my daisy / tip my cup / Cut my thoughts / for coconuts . . ."

With Jack, Neal tried to be the perfect loving brother, to the extent of sharing Luanne. But Jack couldn't screw with Neal present, and passed up the offer. "I didn't want to interfere," Jack wrote later, "I just wanted to follow," and follow he did.[15] On January 19, 1949, they zoomed out of New York, flying through the Jersey mist, snickered at a dawn Washington astir with Truman's inaugural parade, Neal beating out the rhythm of the music on the radio until he had pounded

a hole in the dash. Though Virginia brought them a speeding ticket and an ugly encounter with the police, they quickly forgot their hassles, got high on the warmth of the Georgia air, swept through Alabama listening to the full details of Neal's sexual history, and smiled to hear a black New Orleans disc jockey wailing "Don't worry 'bout nothing!" Considering Bill's anger, their stay in Algiers was pleasant. Al and Helen disappeared into a back room, ignoring Luanne, who wanted to witness the consummation of their marriage; amazingly, they made up and remained married for many years.

In between playing the horses, wandering the city, watching Bill shoot benny tubes off the mantel with an air gun and a flaked-out Joan rake out a tree every morning, Jack listened to Bill lecture on philosophy. Burroughs had developed an attitude he called "Factualism," which, for instance, rejected the idea of crime: "Crime is simply human behavior outlawed by a given culture," he intoned. Bill disapproved of Neal, but not on abstract ethical grounds. In that dry voice of his, he later wrote Jack that "If [Neal] does not feel 'responsibility' toward others, he does not have any. Of course, he can not claim anything from others under the conditions he himself has created." Bill mentally shrugged and continued, "I do not believe he understands this. I suspect he feels that others are under some mysterious obligation to support him." Burroughs felt people should just do as they wanted to do--a right wing

anarchism buttressed by his reading of Wilhelm Reich and his studies of Mayan culture. The whole Mayan culture had been dependent on the priest-run ceremonial calendar, and as the years went by, Bill would come to see the modern media as an equivalent and controlling calendar, editors manipulating readers through layout, editorials, and ads. Burroughs was impressed with Jack and wrote Allen that "He seems much more sensible, more sure of himself than I ever remember him." Jack was also favorably inclined to Bill's views, particularly when one night, while walking by the Mississippi, he had a mystical flash of oneness, then discovered that he couldn't get near the water; the government had fenced it off.

By now, of course, their trip had assumed its own insane momentum. Though Bill refused to lend them money, they set out on January 28th anyway, pressing through the dark Louisiana swamps and across the frozen Texas plains: Neal, Jack and Luanne sat in the front seat, Neal talking, Luanne flirting with both, rubbing cold cream on their cocks as they rolled through the warmer New Mexico desert. Thanks to some adroit thievery and a pawned watch, they managed to stay supplied with gas, food, and cigarettes until they reached Tucson, where another New York friend, Alan Harrington, was willing to advance them a small loan. Across the Mojave desert and up through the Tehachapi Pass, they pushed into the inner valley of California where Jack had once picked cotton; Neal wouldn't listen to his stories of Terry, and

Kerouac wound up dozing through the small town scene of his love.

And suddenly it was over, in more ways than one. Neal dumped Jack and Luanne, both utterly impoverished, on a sidewalk in downtown San Francisco and went off to find Carolyn. There followed a week of such exotically painful hunger as Jack had never before experienced. Luanne managed to talk their way into a room, but they walked miles to look for food, all to no avail. Jack babbled on to her of a dream of his the previous fall, about a saint named Doctor Sax who would destroy the world snake of evil with alchemical herbs, and bring peace. But Luanne was unimpressed and finally deserted him. Sitting on a park bench light headed with hunger, Jack spied an old women who eyed him suspiciously. Shaken, he decided that 200 years before he'd been her thief son. Lost in this fantasy, his mind tripped over the edge. "And for just a moment I had reached the point of ecstasy I had always wanted to reach," he wrote two years later, "which was the complete step across chronological time into timeless shadows, and wonderment in the bleakness of the mortal realm, and the sensation of death kicking at my heels to move on . . . in the magic moth swarm of heaven." He had fallen down the same magic rabbit hole as Allen, into a place where the steady roar in his ears was everywhere and not true sound, where what he felt was a permanent sensation of death and rebirth, bliss perfectly balanced with the agony of

dying. He scrounged some butts out of the gutter, took them back to his room and was smoking them in a pipe when Neal arrived to rescue him. As soon as Memere sent Jack his VA check, he got on a bus and returned to New York.

He arrived there in mid-February, and in late March--the ultimate belated birthday present--he received a letter from Robert Giroux, editor-in-chief of Harcourt Brace and Company, accepting "The Town and the City" for publication; at long last, Mark Van Doren had made the crucial phone call. Giroux was young and sympathetic, and Jack's life and career seemed redeemed. Memere was overjoyed. A thousand dollar advance nearly solved his money problems, allowing again for the possibility of a homestead and marriage. Christ, he thought, all he had to do for the rest of his life was to write books!

On the afternoon he had first spoken with Giroux, he sat in a cafeteria at Lexington and 60th St. in Manhattan, his face creased in a permanent grin and his mind teased with thoughts of trips to Paris; he was young, handsome, successful and gloriously alive. He called John Holmes and asked him to join him. Weirdly enough, John had recently finished his own first novel, and that very day it had been rejected for the first time. As Jack sat there tense with joy, he told Holmes "I'd like to lay every woman in sight." The bizarre dichotomy of their feelings was too much for Holmes, and he made his excuses and left. As he walked away, Jack had his notebook

open, jotting down what it felt like to own the world, writing.[16]

CHAPTER VII

LITRICHUH AND THE ROLLING TRUCKS

John Holmes threw a party to celebrate "Town and City's" sale on Wednesday, April 20, 1949, and Jack gloried in the role of sophisticated author and suave guest of honor, drinking excitedly yet still, Herbert Huncke noticed, "just provincial French enough to be shocked because he'd bought two suits and didn't know how to explain this to Memere." Allen was bugging him as well, asking him to store some letters. It was something of a drag, but then Allen had been so intensely gloomy of late, writing poems about his "vision haunted mind," "the feeling of being closed in / and the sordidness of self." Ginsberg couldn't decide whether the Blake event was a "north polar fixed point life experience," or, as his psychiatrist kept insisting, a hallucination to be dismissed. There were more immediate reasons for Allen's tension; he was in the tightest human vise of all, the awful spot that occurs when close friends, the people you love, become impossible, ask too much of you, begin to consume your life with their problems.

Late in January, Huncke had materialized on the doorstep of Allen's York Avenue apartment, his feet leaving bloody tracks, almost at the point of total collapse. Though Allen needed peace and quiet, it wasn't in his heart to turn away the man who he thought suffered more than anyone, "like a saint of old in the making." At first Huncke was no problem as a guest, since he slept twenty hours a day for weeks. But

by March he was healthy enough to resume his career as a thief, stashing the loot at the apartment, then bringing over his friends Vicki Russell and Little Jack Melody, who quickly moved in. Vicki and Little Jack made a bizarre couple, an energetic six-foot redheaded strutter and a half-bald elf, the genteel son of the Eastern Seaboard branch treasurer of the Mafia. In a scene lifted from the "Beggar's Opera," Little Jack and Vicki would evaluate their stolen merchandise as they made plans to have a baby. Sinking deeper into the morass, Allen even accompanied them on a few raids. The crime scene was too much for him, and rapidly losing his nerve, he decided to split town and visit Bill Burroughs in New Orleans.

Bill wasn't all that supportive--he was dubious about Allen's Blake vision, and dismissed Allen's quandary about how to treat Huncke with the stiff comment, "The more obligation Huncke is under to anyone . . . the more certain he is to steal from or otherwise take advantage of his benefactor"--but life seemed safer in Louisiana. Allen's hope for a refuge was shattered when Joan wrote that Bill had been arrested on April 5th. Caught in a random shakedown while out in his car, Bill had agreed to cooperate if the police turned Joan loose; the police found half a pound of grass, a jar full of seeds, a few capsules of heroin, and some needles. Unfortunately, they also found a few letters from Allen to Bill that discussed marijuana deals. Blessed with a good lawyer, Bill was quickly

out on bail. He ended up fleeing the state and later the country, and when Allen heard that federal narcotics agents had interrogated Burroughs, he decided to hide his incriminating letters and journals for a while. That evening at the party when Allen pressed his request about storing the letters, Jack refused on the grounds that his name was in the letters as well, and "Besides," he sneered, "if you really wanted to get them out of the house you would have done it already yourself."[1]

The day after the party Allen was so broke that he couldn't afford subway fare, and he accepted a ride from Little Jack to Long Island, so that on the way back he could stop at his brother Eugene's apartment and store the letters, and perhaps get a free meal from Melody's family in passing. There was to be no food and no luck at all. Driving the wrong way down a one-way street in Bayside, Queens, Little Jack panicked when a cop approached, tried to run him down with the car, then took off and rounded a corner at sixty-five miles an hour, the car flipping over to create an interior blizzard of letters and papers, furs and radios, while Allen sang "Lord God of Israel, Isaac and Abraham" from the Messiah, in the face of what he took to be his certain death.

Stumbling blindly from the car, his glasses lost in the shuffle, Allen first called Huncke and warned him to clean out the apartment, since its address was strewn throughout the upsidedown turtle of a car behind him. After walking

miles, Allen ran into the flat to find Huncke carefully sweeping up the floor, the heroin stash and loot under his bed untouched. Frantically emptying the junk into the toilet, he screeched questions at Herbert, who placidly replied, "But really, why get hungup? . . . Look how clean everything is." Taking Allen by the arm the way one treats the not-quite-right-in-the-head, Huncke crooned, "Now, don't be angry. Tell me about your visions instead . . . Sit down now." The police burst in a few minutes later.

Jack Kerouac was at a party with Holmes at a mutual friend's when a phone call came, sending them shocked into the streets for the early editions of the next morning's New York Times. Emblazoned across the front page of the April 22, 1949 edition was the headline, "Wrong Way Turn Clears Up Robbery." But their eyes focused quickly on the sub-headline, which, even in the fine gray type of the Times, seemed to shriek at them: "Copy Boy Joined Gang to Get 'Realism' for Story." Jack was sorry for Allen, extremely uptight about the police, and enraged with Huncke. Neal called him down for it, pointing out that he'd had his nose in a book for years, had never really experienced jail, the stuck-in-quicksand feeling of hard--unending--time in the slammer. There was of course nothing Jack could do. Louis Ginsberg hired a good lawyer, Columbia Professor Meyer Shapiro soothed Allen with stories of being arrested as a young man, and Allen became destracted with yet another problem; mad

Naomi Ginsberg was temporarily free from the mental hospital and wanted him to move in with her.

Jack allowed none of the mess to interfere with his plans for a country life, and in mid-May 1949 he and Memere moved to a home he had leased for $75.00 a month in Westwood, Colorado, in the foothills west of Denver. Neal was broke and far away, and it was no ranch commune, but Jack had taken the whole of his book money, minus the price of two suits, and bet it against the fates, trying to reestablish his family's earth connections, to put down roots into the land, to flee modern America. Westwood was a pretty place, full of golden butterflies and touched with natural holiness. Set on the continental divide, it was the directing source of water, of life, and it seemed a promising place to begin anew. Walking in fields of sunflowers in the shadow of the Rocky Mountains, Jack felt like Rubens, rooted to his own American land, while his thoughts went back into the past, searching for the break, thinking deeply of old Lowell days as he wrote long letters to Holmes about GJ and childhood boxing matches.

Kerouac was writing madly, of course, on his book about Neal, which he called "On the Road." There was another piece of work as well, a Spenglerian myth about the plain people of Lowell, the fellahin masses of the earth, called "Rose of the Rainy Night." "Rose" was a poetic experiment,

an attempt to capture the past with a Melvillean style, to develop the dream of St. Sax and "The Myth of the Rainy Night" that he'd had the previous fall. Hitching or riding a horse around Westwood, Jack listened carefully to the local people, fellahins like Lowellfolk, who made allusions to Roy Rogers and Trigger the way urban intellectuals like Holmes used Dostoyevsky or Whittaker Chambers; summering on Cape Cod, Holmes reported that he was studying "Yeats' Plotinus-inspired Unity of Being and Blake's Swedenborgian Visions of Correspondences." Jack went to see Tex Ritter movies. As far as he was concerned, society was insane, an evil mistake; he wanted to become a mountain Thoreau, left alone to gaze at the stars, ride, pray, and sleep.

Three things disturbed his idyll and ended his dream; Memere, sex, and Allen. From her love for storytelling to her fondness for drinking to her gloomy inability to be happy anywhere, Gabrielle was just like her son, and she had quickly decided that the country was not for her. On July 4, 1949, seven weeks after they had settled in Colorado forever, she was on a bus back to the shoe factory in Brooklyn. As to sex, Jack had never planned on being celibate, and he reached four years into his past, renewed his relationship with Edie Parker by mail, and planned to collect her in Detroit as he returned to New York.[2] Above all, Allen's letters disturbed him, for Ginsberg had taken Meyer Shapiro's advice and copped a plea on his arrest, arranging to spend time at

the New York Psychiatric Institute instead of jail; his madhouse tales frightened Jack into horrible memories of his own Navy days, when he thought he could see inside people's minds. Kerouac's empathy, always strong, was on overload.

Carrying his copy of the Bhagavad Gita under his arm, Allen entered the Institute and immediately confronted a fat man named Carl Solomon, who had just emerged from shock treatment. Ginsberg was, as he told his journal, "confused and impotent in action and a prey to all suggestion," and so he responded when Carl asked him who he was by saying "I'm Prince Myshkin [the saintly Idiot]." Solomon smiled and replied, "I'm Kirilov [the hard nihilist in The Possessed]." Though Allen wrote Jack about "The Myth of the Rainy Night," approving of the rain as a symbol for time as he gleefully announced that there was a real Snake Hill with a castle on it near New York City, most of his letters were asylum horror stories of insane attendants, thin-lipped bureaucratic doctors, insulin, electroshock, and other medieval therapies, and patients being destroyed by it all.

Allen didn't know whom to believe; his smart lawyer told him that he was crazy, that his homosexuality was sick, but didn't know that women practiced fellatio. Professor Van Doren demanded that he choose between Huncke and society, while Burroughs harangued him about being "herded around by a lot of old women" like his father and Van Doren, who was a

"sniveling old liberal fruit." There wasn't any doubt Allen was disturbed. The week before he entered the Institute, he had tried to write an application letter for a job, and by the second paragraph he had blown his top, screaming curses at himself for hours into his pillow, hammering his head with his fists as he wallowed in hatred for everything. He felt Bill was afraid of being revealed as crazy himself, that Allen's "analysis" in 1945 had been a "tragic," rather than a silly, farce; meantime he read Solomon's books, like Jean Genet, Henri Michaux, and the mad cruelty of Antonin Artaud.

Jack was kinder to Allen than Burroughs, almost respectful. He wrote Ginsberg that he admired the move to the bughouse, since it showed a true commitment to experience, to learning from people. Gently, he warned Allen that he was playing at madness to somehow justify Naomi against Louis' hateful sanity, but what Jack perceived most was loyalty to a mother--a quality he prized greatly. His letter lovingly added that he desired Allen's happiness, that his brother should do what he really wanted and needed to do.

With Memere gone, all that kept Kerouac in Denver was Robert Giroux's arrival to complete the editing process and prepare the manuscript of "The Town and the City" for the printer. It was a friendly visit, and even Allen, who had distrusted Giroux, approved of the resulting edited work. Bob and Jack hitchhiked a bit as Jack tried to explain his new

work "On the Road" to Giroux, and the editor discussed Yeats and T. S. Eliot with Jack; later they went to Central City for the opera. Jack had dreamed of going to Paris to write "The Myth of the Rainy Night," the story of Dr. Sax, as a masterpiece of poetic recreated life mystery along the lines of Ulysses or Pierre. But the homestead project had left his plans in financial wreckage, and life seemed irrational, an empty balloon as Allen kept saying. Seeing Giroux off at the airport, the thrill of accomplishment vanished for Jack, and all that he could see was a blank death emptiness. He wandered back into Denver naively but sincerely wishing he were black or brown, a true fellahin un-hung-up on career and achievement and success. Two weeks before, he had gotten a letter from Neal, the first in several months, sorrowfully inviting him to San Francisco, warning him that he'd be disappointed, but begging for help; Jack got on a bus, and on the way, he saw the clouds as God, and words rang in his ear: "Go thou, die hence, and of Neal report you well and truly."[3]

Naked once again, Neal answered his door at two o'clock in the morning, saw who was standing there, and cried out "Jack! I didn't think you'd actually do it. You've finally come to see me." "Yep," Jack murmured, "Everything fell apart in me." Shuddering and "Yes!"ing Jack's every comment,

Cassady was on fire, the light of madness like a glowing ember in his bloodshot eyes, and the road vibrations began to pound anew. Upstairs, a newly pregnant Carolyn began to cry, unable to accept the fact that Neal could only be an impulsive "Holy Goof" as Jack called him, not a dependable husband, knowing that the craziness was going to start again.

"Entirely irresponsible to the point of wild example and purgation for us to learn," Neal resembled Groucho to Jack. He had broken his thumb on Luanne's head in February, then infected it with urine from baby diapers until it contracted osteomyelitis; later the tip had to amputated. It flew bandaged behind him like a white flag of demented anarchy as he and Jack raced around the city, stopping only to listen to a tenorman at Jackson's Nook play "Close Your Eyes." Helen Hinckle and Carolyn's other friends cursed Neal for his ineptitude, wished him dead, and Jack came to his defense: "But now he's alive and all of you want to know what he does next," he told them. "And that's because he's got the secret that we're all bursting to find and it's splitting his head wide open and if he goes mad don't worry, it won't be your faults but the fault of God." Carolyn had thrown them out of the apartment on the morning after Jack's arrival, and Kerouac proposed that they go to New York and then Italy; Neal had been shocked and suspicious that Jack cared enough to invite him, but soon accepted.

Sixty hours after Kerouac arrived in San Francisco,

Neal left a note for Carolyn that promised never to bother her again and climbed into the back seat of a Denver-bound Plymouth to begin a high-speed dialogue with Jack about "IT!", hell, the place where time stopped. They talked so frantically, their bodies jerking and bouncing about, that they rocked the car, irritating the tourist-couple-and-salesman trio in the front seat no end. Four hours out on the road, the front seat demanded an overnight stop in Sacramento, where the car's salesman owner coyly informed Neal that some men actually liked sex with other men. As Jack watched from the toilet, Neal tried to hustle "the fag" for money, then fucked him unmercifully, gaining control of the wheel as compensation next morning. At dawn they flew out of Sacramento like a crazed hawk, slashing across the Sierra Nevada mountains talking about each other and Dr. Sax while the squares in the back seat radiated grim hostility all the way to Denver.

Neal's hometown was a drag. The two brothers even quarreled at one point, when Neal hurt Jack's feelings with his teasing. Cassady was out of control, stealing cars left and right, drinking too much, so uncool that he enraged some murderous local rednecks. Jack and Neal quickly decided it was time to depart town, and a drive-away service presented them with a 1947 gangster-style Cadillac limousine to drive to Chicago. Ignoring the two college boy riders in the backseat, Jack put his feet up on the dash and watched the countryside whip past at 110 miles an hour until the speedometer broke

and he blessedly didn't know how fast they were going. After a quick meal-time visit to Neal's childhood Wyoming foster father, Neal put them back on the road for the most insane ride of Jack's life.

Approaching, as Burroughs said later, "the ideal state of absolute impulsiveness," Neal looked like Ahab behind the wheel, his eyes glowing with the divine fire of madness, the radio screaming out bop as they tore across 1,200 miles of America--Wyoming, Nebraska, Iowa, Illinois--along 1949 two lane roads, passing through an infinity of small towns, Pine Bluff, Kimball, Ogallala, North Platte, Grand Island, Carroll, Ames, Sterling, berserkly forcing the car beyond its limits, 110 miles an hour after agonizing hour, too fast, till Jack hid in the back seat, wincing at a thousand near-accidents. But it was not Neal Cassady's fate to die in a car, and seventeen driving hours from Denver they delivered a half-crushed and muddy wreck to the gangster in Chicago before they took a bus to Detroit to see Edie. Grosse Pointe was another disastrous visit, and they spent the night exhausted in the thirty-five cent balcony of a movie theater, drowning in images of Sidney Greenstreet and Peter Lorre in Istanbul of the East and Eddie Dean, the singing cowboy of the West. Pulling out their last few dollars, they got a car ride home; soon they heard Symphony Sid once again, the sound of their bop city, and knew they were there. That night, at Memere's new place at 94-21 134th

St., Richmond Hill, Queens, they were so wired they had to walk around the block before they could sleep. They had packed an eternity of experience into the past five days, and they were burnt out with each other. They shared a visit to Birdland to see saxophonist Sonny Stitt, but when, just five days after their arrival, Jack introduced Neal to a model named Diane "Di" Hansen, Neal's new romance took him almost completely out of Jack's life for nearly a year.[4]

After his debilitating summer, it was easy for Jack to mellow down into his usual fall and winter routine, writing during the week at Memere's, going on occasional weekend sprees with Holmes, Allen, and Lucien in Manhattan. He continued to write a book called "On the Road" through the winter, but this novel centered not on Neal but on a Denver businessman consumed--as Jack thought was true of all businessmen--with guilt; it was completely imaginary. The only interesting mail was a mixed collection of sweet invitation and political rant from Bill and Joan, who now lived in Mexico City. Life there was cheap and pleasant, they reported, with "every conceivable diversion" available, including boys for Allen at forty cents a throw, and tequila at the same price per quart for Jack. Burroughs' socio-political diatribes were intriguing; he jeered at Allen's new-old decision to be a labor leader, and compared his own ideas of unions to those of Westbrook Pegler, "the only columnist, in my opinion, who possesses a grain of integrity." To Burroughs, the U.S. was sliding

inevitably into a bureaucratic police state similar to that in the Soviet Union, and one of the main reasons he liked Mexico was that cops there were on the social level of street car conductors. Liberalism was a "sniveling, mealy mouthed tyranny of bureaucrats, social workers, psychiatrists and union officials."

He also lectured Jack and Allen on Wilhelm Reich, dismissing his social and political ideas but defending the theories of physical health and sexuality. America's approach to sexuality was then defined by a scientist named Alfred Kinsey, whose three pound, eight-hundred page book Sexual Behavior in the Human Male, issued the year before, had sold several hundred thousand copies and created a national sensation. Kinsey's scientific, statistical approach informed the world that one-twelfth of American males were predominantly homosexual, that more than a third had had at least one homoerotic experience, and that seven-tenths of white males had visited a prostitute in the past year; defining present reality was all that he could do. Reich's adventurous theories, on the other hand, tried to destroy prurient American ideas of normality, and through a mind and body therapy break down sexual repressions to create liberated human beings.

A November 1st telegram from Giroux--"Proofs Book One Here Come In Come In Wherever You Are"--set off the countdown to his late February publication date, and as 1950 rolled in, Jack was at peace with himself. He felt so good

that he spontaneously wrote to Allen expressing his love and high esteem. Kerouac even began to think again about marriage and children. Joking one day with Holmes, he dubbed the '50s a "Decade of Parties," and they briefly considered renting a loft on Rose St. under the Brooklyn Bridge as a permanent site for celebration. He had come full circle, as he wrote Charley Sampas after Christmas in a publicity letter for his book, "The Town and the City" bringing "us by a commodious vicus of recirculation past river Eve and Adam back to the nights when we'd all bump on the Square." For him, Lowell was like Asheville or Fresno, "the place where the darkness of the trees by the river, on a starry night, gives hint of the inscrutable future Americans are always longing and longing for."[5]

By March of 1950, the American future had arrived and it looked like 1984. Suspicion, paranoia, and fear settled down over the land. Five weeks before, after fourteen months in two trials, Alger Hiss had been convinced in a judicial disposition that was more cultural war than trial, a clash of symbols--Hiss the radical urban intellectual versus Whittaker Chambers the seedy, roughcut middle American--which gutted the country. The event particularly interested Jack because Lucien covered it for UPI. The Berlin blockade had ended the previous September, while the Smith Act trials

effectively eliminated the organized American left with October convictions of twenty-one Communist Party officials. All of China was united under the red star flag in December, 1949. In West Virginia that February, the junior Senator from Wisconsin, Joseph R. McCarthy, made a speech in which he attacked the Truman Administration with the assertion that he had documentary proof of the existence of 57--or 83--or 205 "known Communists" in the federal government. Jack didn't really believe in nuclear physics, since he had no inner emotional grasp of it, but when Albert Einstein blinked his puppy sad eyes and told an enormous television audience that the newly developed hydrogen bomb meant that "general annihilation beckons," it was hard to ignore him. As The Town and the City was published, Klaus Fuchs pleaded guilty to A-bomb espionage charges in London, implicating Ethel and Julius Rosenberg in America, and Judith Coplon and Valentin Gubichev were found guilty of espionage in New York.

The critical climate could not help but reflect the tortured dissolution of values and stability that intellectuals saw all around them. On the middlebrow level, Robert Spiller's Literary History of the U.S. established a benign, rather sterile consensus of what constituted American literature. More sophisticatedly, the New Critics who controlled the leading literary quarterlies continued their domination of high-culture values--the values of the men who reviewed Kerouac's book--as no group had ever before dominated American literary

culture. Afraid of the freedom implied by the death of old classical values, anxious at the howling existentialist wind that the post-war era suggested, the New Critics had become priests. In a tradition that reached back to Matthew Arnold, who proposed that intellectuals control the rude anarchistic masses by selecting "the best which has been thought and said in the world," they cultivated a bloodless, elitist appreciation of art.

Valuing order (versus anarchy) and thus form in literature above all, this priesthood had sanctified its work to the point where the study of art was superior to its practice. Priesthood was an accurate description--the "stifling religiosity" of Allen Tate's classroom was infamous--and somehow necessary, for these embattled friars felt that they were holding back not only the scruffy masses and their comic books, but defending humanistic values from science, the awesome juggernaut that held sway on the western world's truth exchange. The New Critics were not a single entity, and in fact reflected the real nature of art by being contradictory and confused, but cumulatively they partially accepted science and developed a rationale for objective, impersonal, elitist art, turning poems into "Aesthetic Objects" and tittering with joy at the pleasure of studying the last eight lines of The Waste Land, which contained eight quotations in five languages, including Provencal and Sanskrit, and one and a half lines by the poet

himself. As a working class Canuck, Jack didn't fit the WASP values the priests certified.[6]

Dedicated to Bob Giroux, "Friend and Editor," The Town and the City appeared on March 1st and received mixed reviews. Each critic noted its vitality, but worried over its form and message. Newsweek called it "almost a major work," but said "the longwinded nonsense of its intellectuals is well-nigh unreadable," while the New York Times found it a "rough diamond of a book," but decided that its negative view of the city was "exaggerated." Howard Mumford Jones in the Saturday Review labelled it "radically deficient in structure and style"--"time as development is not treated"--and the New Yorker was least kind, terming it "ponderous, shambling . . . tiresome."

The intellectual "Family" of New York had spoken, as one of their victims later put it, "after midnight in voices like snakes and beetles and rats, hiss and titter, prick and sip," but Jack partied on, the handsome young genius author lionized by the rich, meeting Gore Vidal at a party, making contacts, learning the right names. It was something of a relief to go to Lowell on a publicity visit that March, and his home town treated him well. Charley Sampas filled the Sun with blurbs about The Town and the City, the newspaper bought it for serialization, and Jack enjoyed the ritual of autographing copies at the Bon Marche department store before he hit the Blue Moon Lounge for a riotous

celebration with his old friends GJ, Roland Salvas, and Jim Sampas.[7]

But his return to the city made the eternal split inside him, the chasm between the Partisan Review intellectuals and the natural hipsters, all too obvious. He was sure that if he remained in the intellectual set he would become a criminal among the bourgeois, like Balzac's Vautrin, a criminal fraud of the arts, as he told John Holmes. Even the hip intellectuals like Jay Landesman, publisher of Neurotica, a magazine devoted to describing a "neurotic society from the inside," didn't fit his life, though he was glad when Landesman decided to publish "Pull My Daisy" (under the title "Fie my Fum"), the poem he'd written with Allen and Neal. Jack's kind of guy was someone like Cleophus, a black man he'd met in February, a drinking buddy who talked and gesticulated like Neal, had Allen's spirit, and greeted Jack with a spontaneous burst of affection, shouting that "Christ is at our shoulder, everything's fine . . . I want to dig everybody."

Shuddering at a now hideous country, Jack longed to see a biblical curse strike America, leaving behind a resurrected, truly great nation rooted not in the slick sickness of Time, but the spiritual power of a man like Cleophus. As for himself, he told John Holmes that he had to choose between "the drawing rooms full of Noel Cowards and the rattling trucks on the American highways." It wasn't a

really difficult decision; his subject was the road, not an upper East Side salon. There was more to his choice than that, of course. Despite a blurb in Publisher's Weekly that promised "heavy national advertising," the book had not sold and he was broke, forced to hitchhike, live with Memere, and go Dutch treat on dates. Once his redeemer, the book now seemed vulgar, only hinting big, a mere delusion; suddenly he realized that he had associated it with home and land and farm and mother, with an immortality of sorts while he connected Neal and Allen and Bill and hitchhiking and sex with the half of life that was death. As summer came, he knew that it was once again time to run the edge, to take risks and grow, to embrace the eater of souls and die in order to be reborn.[8]

Jack cut out for Denver in June 1950, planning to spend a week with old friends before taking a train to Mexico City and Burroughs. He had a pleasant bus ride out, rolling through the ethereally beautiful Shenandoah Valley and over the misty Blue Ridge mountains, and Denver was just as nice; Ed White and Bev Burford were there, and the drinks and sunshine were refreshing. Then the phone rang. It was Justin Brierly, with the news that Neal, "like a burning shuddering frightful Angel, palpitating toward me

across the road," as Jack later put it, had left New York in a '37 Ford intending to pick up Jack in Denver, then go to Mexico to divorce Carolyn so that he could marry Diane Hansen, who was pregnant. Jack and Neal had seen little of each other since the previous summer: Neal had worked a parking lot job and lived with Diane in an East Eighties apartment, smoking grass and playing with his old pornographic deck of cards. Cassady had come to Jack's apartment in Richmond Hill once or twice, usually to watch baseball on the TV set Jack had given Memere--when Neal was there there were usually two radios to catch the Dodgers and Giants as well as the Yanks--and once, after Neal quick-changed a customer for some extra money, they went to see mighty Lester Young at Birdland.

Cassady leaped back into Jack's life as of old, raving about plans and glittering sheer energy, jacking the pace of life back into the realm occupied by saints, geniuses, and those who knew. They collected a third partner for gas money, a young kid named Frank Sheperd who kept squealing "Hot damn!" and "Son of a bitch!" at Neal's more extravagant outbursts of lunacy, then drove swiftly south, through Colorado, New Mexico, and into Texas, then over a hill and into the lush tropical heat of the Rio Grande Valley. Nervous and more than a little confused, Jack made Neal throw away his grass seeds before entering Mexico at Laredo. But their customs official proved to be "lazy and tender," changing

their money into lovely fat rolls of pesos that seemed to buy so much that they immediately burst down the streets of Nuevo Laredo, bugeyed at the white shirted men lounging in doorways even though it was three in the morning, and into a bar where they enjoyed their first Mexican cerveza.

They had escaped America, and even seedy Nuevo Laredo seemed like Holy Lhasa to Jack. When they bought grass in the hamlet of Gregoria from a kid named Victor and his aged mother came out from behind his house with a fat cigar full of guaranteed superior brain cell destroyer, they thought they'd found paradise: "There's no suspicion here," whispered a shocked Neal, barely able to comprehend the possibility, "nothing like that." Stoned to the eyeballs, they indulged in an expensive but superb mini-orgy set to Mambo in a whorehouse before pushing on down the road through the bugs and jungle to a second shock. Too exhausted to continue, they parked by the side of the road, and with Frank in the car, Jack on top, and Neal in the road, they slept. A cop came by, and asked Jack if Neal was sleeping. Jack nodded, "Si, si, Dormiendo," and assured that the dirty vagrant was not injured, the peaceful guardian sauntered off without bothering them.

Mexico City and its Indians, monasteries, unmufflered cars and roaring street life was the end of the road to them, the last stop of civilization and simultaneously an outpost of "Fellahin Eternal Country Life." To Jack it resembled

Lowell in its "simplicity [and] straightforwardness," but unfortunately, by the time he got there he was vomiting his insides out and burning with the fever of dysentary. As Bill and Joan nursed him, Neal, whom Jack thought of as "completely and godlikely aware of every single little thing trembling like a drop of dew in the world," took his divorce and after a quick, delirious goodbye, jumped back into the car and hurtled back down the road bound for New York. Brother Cassady reached his zenith in the next few days, driving his car until the engine fell out in Lake Charles, Louisiana, then flying to Newark where he married Diane Hansen on July 10th; the next day he used his Southern Pacific brakeman's pass to get on a train to return to San Francisco and Carolyn.[9]

When his health returned, Jack settled into a satisfying routine centered on an endless succession of powerful reefer, the sort of 15-joints-a-day regimen that will leave one mummified in marijuana fumes, time and space slowed down so that it seems one is passing through invisible quicksand, the textures of every object become entrancing, the music in the street almost painfully sweet. Stuffing his stomach with cheeseburgers at a lunchroom on Insurgentes Boulevard, Jack was bothered only by the "police action" in Korea, which had begun on June 24th, about the time he had arrived in Mexico City. He didn't care who had started it, only that people were dying, and that the younger brothers of

the friends with whom he'd faced World War II were now draft bait. It all seemed pointless somehow, as he sucked in some more smoke to set the pleasant little colored spots to dancing in front of his eyes. Between the cheating scandals at West Point and CCNY, the Kefauver Committee's televised exposure of squalid corruption and the Mafia, and the ugly rumors about "five percenters" in the Truman Administration, it was much, much better to stay stoned, listen to Bill talk about drugs that transformed people into insects, read Bill Junior's fairy tales, eat mangoes, and stay stoned.

But of course he couldn't escape all the evil, and seeping up out of the deranged grass fumes, his own sorrow at the world, and a visit to the bullfights, came a vision that made him decide that Ernest Hemingway was a fool, that violent, "macho," exploitative America was lost, that the human race was doomed. Returning from the killing of the first bull at the Cuatro Caminos Ring, he meditated deeply on the bull, the sword, and the gallons of blood splashed on the sand, until he saw a pile of bricks and imagined it as an altar. Staring at it from a crouch, he felt overwhelmed by a whole series of images, each representing a possibility for his life, until one took over and dominated, an image of the "Great Walking Saint of On the Road." The Walking Saint would be a pilgrim who would traverse until his death the American streets and roads as penance for its sins, loving all its creature-inhabitants, asking the

cars as they hurtled by, "Whither goest thou?" With the hot sun glaring overhead and the bricks in front of him, Jack was sure that "We are doomed. But the light educates the gloom."

Dope was somehow light-bringing, Jack knew, a liberating solvent that could melt the barriers of repression in his mind and allow the stored images to gush out. For his permanent stupefaction on cannabis, as with everything else, was directed toward his art. The Navy had rejected him as schizophrenic, and perhaps they had a point; surely he knew that there was a screaming division in his life over the past years between what--and how--he had been writing, and the way he had been living. The Town and the City had been written for Memere and Leo with the tones of an orchestra, yet all the most important things in his life had been fueled with Benzedrine and roared down the road on flying wheels.

He saw the road, felt it to his core, but although the images bubbled and floated in the caldron of his brain, he was still shackled with the writing rules he had learned at Columbia, was still bound up, unable to put down the rush, the flow, the energy of Neal and the road on paper. Mexico City was too distracting, between the too easily available whores and Bill's morphine, and early in the fall of 1950 he returned to Richmond Hill with a bag full of strong

marijuana and returned to his labors at the kitchen table.

After dinner with Memere, he would slip into the bathroom, explode his brain with two or three joints, and dizzily sit down at the kitchen table to celebrate the mystery that was Neal, long onion-like exfoliating sentences slipping out of his pen, 20,000 words on one day of Neal's life, the day he had met Jim Holmes in Peterson's Pool Hall. All the hours of Neal's flaming road monologues on his childhood became condensed and somehow purified as Jack wrote, the grass somehow lubricating his mind. Yet it was all so strange, so different. No one in the New York literary world was writing like that, and Kerouac was unsure of what he had created. He showed his work to Holmes one day in Glennon's Bar, their favorite tavern, and though John was enthusiastic, Jack still plunged into a deep depression, wandering Manhattan with Vicki Russell, listening to George Handy's "The Blues," preoccupied with dope and death.

When he began to rant to Allen about being in a Godly state, even the Blakean mystic began to doubt his sanity. Of course, that summer Allen had begun his first deep relationship with a woman, sighing in relief to Jack, "I'm a man, I'm a man, I've got a cock," and had a secure job working for the New Jersey Labor Herald. Yet Ginsberg hadn't changed too dramatically. He counseled Jack "to destroy all in your nature that gives you feelings of lonely power and pride: which destruction is accomplished by a sort

of Jewish skeptical humor in regard to one's own megalomania." He called Jack's attitude megalomania because Kerouac claimed that his piece on Neal's boyhood was his best work so far; as Neal told Allen, it was the solitary pride of marijuana talking; high, "the sheer ecstasy of utterly realizing each moment makes it more clear to one than ever how impossibly far one is from the others."[10]

The twisted savagery of the grass was intense enough, but another calamity surfaced and made life even weirder: Jack's friend Bill Cannastra died, and in such a strange way that the mind couldn't let it rest, the sort of bizarre death that was perfectly consonant with his character, but left one with the acid taste of blind fate in one's mouth. No sweet organic death at the end of a full and rich life was meant for him. Cannastra was a handsome graduate of Harvard Law School who worked in a bakery, and whose alcoholic dissipations and sometime cruelty were nearly legendary in that circle of friends. He was simply outrageous, walking into longshoremen's bars and French kissing the biggest brute in the place; as that particular maneuver made obvious, he seemed surrounded by what John Holmes called "a tantalizing aura of doom." Sometimes the doom was tangible, as when he'd teeter on the edge of a roof seventy feet from a fast splat on the asphalt, coyly asking Jack, "Do you want me to fall?"

Though Cannastra's loft on West 21st St.--next door to Lucien's place--was above a lampshade factory, stank of

glue, and brimmed with junk and filth, it was a major party scene, and Jack even did what he called a "couple of collaborations" with Bill and some blond ladies there. Cannastra was wild and thus interesting to watch--one morning about three, he ran naked around the block in the rain, and Kerouac even followed, though in his shorts. But Cannastra usually preferred to do the watching; he'd had a peephole drilled so that he could observe people in his bathroom. His outrageousness cost him his life. As his train pulled out of the Bleecker St. subway station on the night of October 12, 1950, Cannastra suddenly got up and decided to go back to the San Remo bar for another beer, pulled down a window and climbed half-way out, and had his neck snapped by the walls of the tunnel, his body forced down under the wheels until it was ground into nothingness.

Shocked into a painful limbo, Jack left town for a while and then returned and moved into Cannastra's loft in early November, in the process meeting Joan Haverty, Bill's last girlfriend. She was tall, darkhaired, and attractive like a model, the right kind of woman for Jack thought John Holmes, "full of youth and eagerness, the kind of innocence that goes with being twenty." With hardly any warning to anyone, the couple gathered up a few close friends on November 17th, went to a judge's apartment on Abingdon Square,

and with Lucien as best man, got married. Afterwards they returned to the loft on West 21st St. and threw a party--twenty were invited, two hundred showed--that went on all night and left dozens of cigarette butts on the floor, a clogged toilet, and an amazing quantity of unidentifiable but evil-smelling stuff in the crevice behind the refrigerator. The party resounded with Lucien and Allen's rendition of "Them Wedding Bells is Breaking Up That Old Gang of Mine," but they sang without "real sadness," Allen explained, since they knew that "anyway we could break into each other's apartments still in the middle of the night." Near dawn, Allen, Jack and Lucien huddled together and kissed and sang "Eli, Eli" amidst loving conversation.

Joan worked in a department store and Jack got a job synopsizing novels for possible script use at 20th Century-Fox, and through the end of the year, their married life passed in familial security. Only Neal and Lucien had reservations about the relationship; Lucien thought he'd married Joan because she was an upper class bohemian. Neal wrote a long profile of Jack's character to Allen, calling him a "true peasant"--"like a potato," as Jack said of himself--gentle natured and yet overwhelmingly emotional, possessed by a "morbid dread of Hassles" yet contradictory. Given Jack's artistic and intellectual focus and Joan's complete disinterest in such things, Cassady the man of many women felt "It all depends on how much she'll leave Jack alone,

I fear she won't be bright enough to see this." His letter to Jack wished him the best as he congratulated his brother on the possibility that he had impregnated Joan on their wedding night, but warned Kerouac of his own somber nature combined with his deep and thus far frustrated desire for family. Neal was right; there was only one God Jack could worship, and it was inside a typewriter, not his wife's belly; after a couple of weeks of marriage he complained that too many friends came by the loft and he couldn't work, so they moved in with Memere. Joan enjoyed Memere, even though Gabrielle excluded her by speaking only French with Jack, but the utter lack of privacy in Richmond Hill drove her out of the house, and she moved into the ground floor of a brownstone on West 20th St., between 8th and 9th Avenues, with Jack docilely following.[11]

Things were confused, because originally they'd planned to move to San Francisco. Neal had been gigglingly teasing Jack to join the Cassadys and get out of "frosty fagtown New York" all fall, and in January 1951, Jack returned from a late night walk to notice a funny smile on Joan's face and a battered copy of Proust on the radio; his western kinsman had arrived. Unfortunately, Neal was five weeks early, the Kerouacs had saved none of the necessary money, and they couldn't go anywhere. Neal went across town to visit Di Hansen and their son Curtis, born the previous fall. Although Di had given him a certificate

the year before that proclaimed him "the best lay in the U.S.A.," a "veritable mecca of satisfaction and pleasure," this time around she didn't want to hear about it and threw him out. Three days later he exhaustedly lugged his pitiful cardboard suitcase onto a train back to San Francisco.

His letters remained, and they were powerful. Throughout that previous fall and well into the spring of 1951, Neal would write Allen and Jack to tell them that he was unable to write, that he had bought a tape recorder to avoid working--"SO HORRIBLY HORRIBLY SHITPOT HARD FOR ME"--on his autobiography, that he was emotionally paralyzed and unable to cover the necessities of life, like seeing the doctor about his nasal problems, foot problems, his thumb and hemorrhoids, see the dentist about his teeth, fix his car, and buy a railroad lantern. Yet in September he managed a superb letter to Jack about a conversation with a bum at work one day, and in November a wonderful eight-page description of a brief encounter with a bullshitting bore on a railroad trip, an infinitely detailed recreation of how he had led the man on until the bore announced that he had written a clinical study of "The Confessions of a Dope Addict." Neal depicted himself slowly destroying the man's pose with sharper and sharper questions until--in an extremely funny passage--he wholly ruined the phony's aplomb with a spasm of hysteria, snarling to his seatmate that he, Cassady, was a marijuana addict who had an extreme compulsion to

strangle people. The fool didn't sleep for as long as he had to share the car with Neal, and both Allen and Jack laughed until they cried.

Ten days later Neal sent a contemplation of the concept of soul to Allen that included thoughts like "At any particular time, therefore, the current image of the soul is a function of the current language and its inner symbolism. Scientific psychology . . . is unable to discover or even approach the essence of the soul. Like everything else that is no longer becoming but become, it has put a mechanism in the place of an organism . . . And the soul remains what it was, something that can neither be thought nor represented; the Secret, the ever-becoming, the pure experience." On February 6th he wrote Jack to assure him of his love, but swore that he was sunk in masturbation and terrible blood dreams, sleep pursuits that eternally ended with him caught, conning his way out--and waiting unto infinity for resolution.

In late February Cassady sent a letter that convinced both Jack and Allen that he was the best writer living, a reportedly forty-thousand word masterpiece description of his sex life with a Denver woman named Joan Anderson that, said Allen, "reads with spew and rush, without halt, all unified and molten flow; no boring moments, everything significant and interesting, sometimes breath taking in speed and brilliance."[12] Neal shrugged off their praise though he

admitted it was the result of three solid Benzedrine filled afternoons and evenings; to Jack, it was a godsend, a click of recognition in his inner ear that told him that this was the way to tell a story--just spontaneously tell it, allow it to flow out, to assume its own shape, to use the infinite accretion of details as a form itself.

Early in April 1951, Jack pulled up his chair to the kitchen table he had placed behind a screen in the apartment on West 20th St. and began to write the story of Neal and the road. Since he could type one hundred words a minute, he'd always been distracted by the repetitive task of replacing sheets of paper after quickly filling them, but this time he taped together long sheets of Chinese art paper to form a long roll that fed through his machine. Steaming on a small river of coffee, he sat down in the morning and got up late in the evening, devoting himself utterly to the story of meeting Neal and their various voyages since 1947. The sentences were short and tight, clickety-pop word bursts that caught the rhythm of the high-speed road life as no author before him ever had. He was deliberately optimistic as he wrote, filling the new and final "On the Road" with exuberance and superlatives as a conscious counter-argument to Burroughs' and Spengler's skepticism about life. Early on he wrote, "I shambled after as I've been doing all my life after people who interested me, because the only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk,

mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn . . ."

"On the Road" was about being lost in America with Neal; the focus was tight and Jack usually kept himself more-or-less invisibly in the background. It was a mature work from a perspective that Allen called "rueful self appraisal," which left in his disastrous and embarrassing day at Bear Mountain just because it was true. Some of the book even appropriated Neal's letters, transmuting sentences into book dialogue. Kerouac had written The Town and the City to Jascha Heifitz; "On the Road" was set to the mad flying pound of Max Roach's bop drums, the whole of the book bursting with energy, with a feeling of life struggling inside a deathly society, energy burning bright before the laws of entropy and the nation caught up. And he wrote it with wisdom, for his description of his San Francisco hunger satori in January of 1949 was not "the work of a wounded boy," as Allen later said, but "of a completely matured Boddhisattva prophet."

He had completed 34,000 words by April 9th, and finished the book, around 175,000 words in all, on April 25th, after 20 days of writing. "He didn't know if it was any good," recalled John Holmes, who saw it on April 27th; "he hadn't read it yet." Holmes was excited and enthusiastic, and Allen wrote of it to Neal, "the writing is dewlike, everything happens as it really did, with the same juven-

escent feel of spring."[13]

Kerouac paid a heavy price for the book; immersed in the endless space of creativity, at once at the very peak of his artistic power and yet in such fresh territory that he was wholly vulnerable to criticism, he gave all of his attention to his typewriter and none to Joan. Sick of slaving at an ugly, boring job to support a distracted zombie who refused to get a job like other men, a newly married husband who wanted only to be left alone, Joan began to complain. One of the central myths of Jack's life was of Dostoyevsky's wife and her unflagging support of her husband, of the duty of the untalented to support the creative artist. Uninterested in reshaping American prose, Joan knew her feet hurt and she had a lazy bum for a husband; on May 5th she threw him out, and he went back, as Allen said, to "the woman that wanted him most"--Memere.

That lasted only a few days, and Kerouac soon moved into the loft Lucien then shared with Allen on West 21st St., where he began to type the long roll into pages, changing and adding to it a little--the sentence about the "mad ones," for instance--as he typed. Then he submitted it to Giroux, and so began six years of frustration. He wanted to end it with prophecy, but as Allen told Neal, "He is afraid to foretell tragedy." Neal thought that he was too trivial a theme for a book, that Jack should, like Neal's favorite writer Proust, make "On the Road" merely the first book of many, and begin a

second book on the Doctor Sax material. As for his own future, Neal predicted an early death from prostate cancer caused by excessive masturbation or possibly death in a chain gang after being sent to San Quentin for the rape of a teenager. Allen and Lucien both criticized the book for looseness and lack of focus, and it hurt Jack. He agreed with many of their overt literary criticisms, but saw his work as Blake's "crooked road of prophecy," and thought that his friends wanted him to take a straight and easy path. He began immediately to plan revisions, cuts as well as extensive insertions. One plan was to eliminate all the non-Neal material, expand Neal's childhood, and surround him with imaginary characters like The Walking Saint or "Pictorial Review Jackson," a young black North Carolinian who had originally been one of the characters in Jack's childhood card baseball games.

In May, catastrophe visited him twice. Giroux rejected the book, according to Jack because "the sales manager would not approve of it," though the editor also commented, "But Jack, it's just like Dostoyevsky." As Giroux later recalled it, it was because the book was too messy, and what he saw was not what was later published as "On the Road." Holmes gave the manuscript to his agent Rae Everett, and she returned it with a great deal of carping criticism.[14]

To make matters far, far worse, Joan told Jack that

she was pregnant. A few weeks after they separated, she and Jack talked on Lucien's roof and almost reconciled, but the idea of eight hour wage slavery in support of a child frightened Jack too much in his vulnerable state, and he wouldn't go through with a return to marriage. Instead, he decided that it wasn't his child, ravingly denied it to his closest friends, and rejected the thought completely. His action stemmed partly from the grossest desire to devote himself to art rather than shit-labor, but it also sprang from a deep and basic horror of bringing life into the sorry world, a reflexive attitude that involved Gerard, Sammy Sampas, and Leo, that reflected his increasing distrust of life, and of women--both things inextricably wound together in his mind. Janet Michele Kerouac was born on February 16, 1952, and Jack paid not a penny for her support until she was ten years old.

His body reacted to the tension and removed him from the battle zone. Once again he was stricken with thrombophlebitis, which forced him to move in June 1952 to Nin's place in Kinston, North Carolina, where Memere nursed him.

A classic bored invalid with his leg propped up on a chair, Jack could find excitement only in the long rushing letters that Neal sent, enticing supplications for Jack to live in Cassady's attic for free. Never was a con--if it was a con--more attractive; Neal described the fine huge desk, lamps, dictionary, and radio in the attic, and promised free

laundry, dexedrine, use of the car; total freedom to write or not, get up or not, be grumpy or not. Cassady promised Valhalla and very nearly threw in Carolyn on the side, for in fact Neal needed Jack very badly. According to Neal, it would all be like an English country weekend that stretched into months. Later he sent a letter guaranteeing a brakeman's job at five hundred dollars a month until December, easy as anything, come Come COME!, assuring him that he should be on the road the day he received the letter. Jack accepted, but couldn't do it immediately; his leg kept him in Kinston till August, then put him into Kingsbridge, Bronx, VA Hospital until early October. In the meantime he read voraciously--D. H. Lawrence's The Rainbow, Blake's Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Whitman's Specimen Days, Faulkner's Pylon, Melville's Encantanada's, and more--and listened to the National League whip the American League in the All-Star game.

Another book briefly occupied him, a piece of pure fiction not subject to the criticisms of the raw, spontaneous "Road." He told Allen and John it would be called "Horn," and would concern jazz. That was only a cover. The path he was following with "Road's" spontaneous fluidity was undoubtedly the right direction; it was merely insufficient. Writing Holmes, Kerouac said, "I want deep form, poetic form, the way consciousness really digs everything that happens."[15]

Sitting in that stupid chair under the burning Carolina

sun, a book in his lap and the radio on, his life a total shambles, Jack was strangely calm: After all, there was very nearly nothing left to go wrong. With his marriage a failure, his health crumbling, and his art so strange that a respected editor had rejected it, all that remained for him was his identity as a writer, and one thing else. Between Cape Cod and the Golden Gate, no one knew the land the way he did, had eaten so much road dirt, talked to so many wanderers, heard or felt or touched or smelt so much of the complicated inland sea called America; if he could combine his sense of land, time and space, the bardic impulse to sing, and his sorrowful Dostoyevskian awareness of temporality and death in some "deep form" fusion, he would be redeemed, and he was sure of it.

He sat and thought, scribbling furiously in his nickel notebook, waiting for illumination, for the fire to come down.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BREAKTHROUGH

> Literary form, to the New Critics, was an "indeterminable vision of some secret ideal, an idea fundamentally vague, and therefore in the service of every personal association of snobbery, eccentricity, rigid malice or plain ignorance the critic might reveal. It had, in a word, become a sentimental symbol of order in a world that had no order; it had become the last orthodoxy in the absence of all other orthodoxies.
>
> Alfred Kazin

> Form is never more than an extension of content.
> Robert Creeley - Charles Olson

Trapped beneath a thin white hospital sheet, Jack was too excited to do anything but squirm, his books and pen ignored as he listened tensely to Mel Allen, the New York Giants' radio announcer, describing the baseball game. The 1951 season had been crazy throughout. In the American League the Red Sox and the Indians had taken the New York Yankees to the wire before losing in the last week, while the Brooklyn Dodgers had choked on a 13 game mid-August lead and let the Giants catch them on the very last day of the season. Now they were at climax, in the third game of a best-of-three playoff series for the National League pennant. Ralph Branca, pitching for a classic Dodger team that included Roy Campanella, Duke Snyder, Jackie Robinson, Pee Wee Reese, and Gil Hodges, looked down the sixty-six feet six inches to the plate, warily eyeing third baseman Bobby Thomson, the Giants' batter. Branca's Dodgers led 4-2, but

there were men on second and third base, and every Dodger fan in America was wondering whether the never-say-die nobodies on the Giants were going to work some terrible hoodoo.

Somehow, destiny blessed Thomson; in one of those divine moments of human theater that give sport its place in human affairs, Bobby Thomson belted Branca's pitch into the Polo Grounds bleachers for a 5-4 Giant win and Jack, as he later put it, "trembled with joy and couldn't get over it for days and wrote poems about how it is possible for the human spirit to win after all!"

As if his joy had lifted him above all roadblocks, Jack began to assimilate crucial new elements of his art in October, his favorite month, the time when the cleansing fall winds blew away the cobwebs and molds and diseases that he associated with summer. Nearly two months of uninterrupted contemplation while staring at the VA Hospital ceiling had forced him to some basic conclusions about his career as a writer. The most painful realization was that his new material was probably too different ever to be published, so that he would consequently never be respectable, never be able to support Memere. But somewhere within he found the courage to humiliate himself, to live off Memere and devote everything to his art. Nothing mattered but the writing anymore, not the social stigma of being supported nor even the conventional

rules of style; he had decided to ignore everything but completeness of detail, with telling the truth in all its hideous glory. Walking in the October winds in Richmond Hill, he was poised on the crest of a creative wave that would soon break and expose his artist's soul to himself, in two parts.

In the middle of the month he went to hear the great alto saxophonist Lee Konitz at Birdland. Konitz slipped with awesome subtlety into the middle of "I Remember April" and swam through chorus after chorus of a solo, crystallizing for an entranced Jack the spontaneous, improvisatory nature of his <u>own</u> art; he wrote in his ever present nickel notebook, "Blow As Deep as You Want to Blow." A week later, on October 25, 1951, he sat in a Chinese restaurant near Columbia, and when his friend Ed White suggested that he try sketching like a painter, but with words, something deep in Jack's brain resonated. He ran home that night from the subway station, then stopped in front of a bakery window and began to sketch its contents into his notebook, down to the last cherry on the coconut cake, until his fingers grew too numb from the cold. Then he raced home to the kitchen table to complete the sketch from memory.[1]

A hundred experiences contributed to Kerouac's conception of spontaneous sketching; Neal's letters, the idea of unrestricted orgasm in Reich, his childhood Catholic

confessional, Goethe, Yeats' trance writing, even the movies. After staring for hours at movie screens--not the story lines, but the abstract electrical particles that were pieces of the whole--he wanted to invent a book movie that was not a scenario but an actual sensual movie on the page. The seed of sketching was as old as the panoramic consciousness of the football scenes in Town and City, a Wolfean-Proustian extended style that was now about to achieve fruition. Yet his primary desire was to write with total honesty and shamelessness, to expose his naked mind fearlessly, capturing in words the segment of time--"Time is of the essence"--and space that he envisioned. Honesty alone, it seemed to him, could revitalize the arts and human relations in the sickly atmosphere of the Cold War. He was of course at total odds with the New Critics, whose elder statesman John Crowe Ransom warned that "the direct approach is perilous to the artist, and may be fatal . . . an art is usually, and probably of necessity, a kind of obliquity." R. P. Blackmur, another leading New Critic, added that "When you depend entirely upon the demon of inspiration, the inner voice, the inner light, you deprive yourself of any external criterion."

External criteria were all the rage for most young Americans, who shared a pronounced distaste for both the war in Korea and pacifism, whose ambitions focused solely on career and marriage and mortgage, who avoided possible

charges of subversive thinking by hiding their minds in the newly developing world of television. In the words of one contemporary observer, it was a generation "pathetic, laconic, no great loves, no profound hates, and pitifully few enthusiasms."[2]

Kerouac worked alone that November, sketching a diner, a movie theater, and the Elevated station at 3rd Avenue and 47th St., not merely describing the diner but recreating it, detail after perfect detail coagulating into a portrait so real that a later reader could experience it, go to bed and dream that he'd been there, been to a 1940s diner that was not white tile and aluminum but wood and marble, the home of Edward Hopper and Little Caesar, the theater scruffy, a B-movie cistern of our culture's image bank. The description of the dull brown El station opened in the urine yellow men's room, Jack contemplating the difficulties of masturbating while seated before going out to watch the bums who haunted the place, seeing the "flash of their mouths, like the mouths of minstrels." He went into St. Patrick's Cathedral and fled in disgust at stylish tourists and a grotesquely patriotic sermon on Douglas MacArthur. As he sat in a 6th Avenue cafeteria window later, his consciousness expanded to note the play of lights across a car fender outside, mirrors and neon and windows psychedelically combining to form a magic theater from which he observed, mind reading the consciousness of a woman eating

at a nearby table, then writing in summation, "I dig jazz, a thousand things in America, even the rubbish in the weeds of an empty lot, I make notes about it, I know the secrets . . . and I dig you as we together dig the lostness and the fact that of course nothing's ever to be gained but death."

The agonies of the road and guilty memories of Lowell had opened him up and refined him into an observing anima, a "recording angel" as he later called himself, a divine scribe, and after nearly twenty years of constant writing, he had achieved a facility with language that turned words into fluid notes, ready to help him sing the tale of his age, to be, as he described himself, "a great rememberer redeeming life from darkness."

By December his leg had fully healed and it was again time to roam. Even more to the point, Memere was closing their flat; she had never really liked the noisy City, and had decided to accept Nin's offer to move to North Carolina. Though he wanted to join Neal in San Francisco, Jack was too broke--until salvation arrived in the rotund form of Henry Cru, who once again promised him a sailing job, this time on the S.S. President Adams. As he read the fascinating destinations--Manila, Kobe, Singapore--inscribed on the Adams' cargo stacked on the Hoboken docks, Jack was even prepared to work as a deckhand to get

on the steamer, which was on a round-the-world cruise.

As usual with a Henry Cru scheme, the job never quite came through. But Henry persuaded him--and lent him the money--to take a bus to San Pedro, California, to join the ship there. Jack packed his seaman's bag with crepe sole shoes, blue Eversharp pencils, a tiny bible he'd stolen somewhere, dark glasses from the hospital, his rag ends of clothing, and the growing stack of manuscript he'd created that year. Covering over Leo's old typewriter, the one on which he'd written The Town and the City, he got on the bus for San Francisco. He worked the Christmas rush at the railroad baggage room there, then rode free to Los Angeles with a pass Neal had given him. Wasted by a miserable cold, he slumped wearily on the San Pedro docks, choking and snuffling through the stench of oil, rubber, and a cat food factory. Behind him he sensed the raw bulk of his beloved America, but ahead were new lands to explore and record.

There was, of course, no job; Jack had no union seniority. So he returned to 29 Russell St., San Francisco, and moved into the spare, half-finished attic room the Cassadys had offered him so that he could teach Neal how to devote himself to writing--actually, he expected to learn infinitely more from his brother than vice-versa.[3] At first he was shy and formal with Carolyn, because the last time he'd seen her she was evicting them. But since Neal had returned to her from Diane Hansen and New York, their romance

had evolved into a ripe and loving union. She encouraged Jack to talk about his divorce, and he told her about Joan. "You see," he said, "she was an only child, raised by women, a mother and aunts. They all hated men and they taught her to, too." Then he began a bitter rant, shocking Carolyn, who'd always heard him speak with the utmost sentimental regard for women. "I caught her with this Puerto Rican a couple of times . . . " With Neal often away at work, the two of them grew close, strolling together through Chinatown and North Beach.

Twenty-nine Russell St. was a tiny house on a miniature block, nestled on the side of elegant, beautiful Russian Hill and cheered by the sound of cable car bells, and life in the attic was all that Neal had promised. The low bed with its paisley spread, the burlap curtains and huge desk made it homey and a perfect work place for Jack, except that he had to pass through Neal and Carolyn's bedroom to get to the bathroom, and nervously demanded that Carolyn be dressed at all times. Often he urinated out his window rather than take the chance of seeing or being seen nude.

He enjoyed being uncle to the children, telling stories to four year old Cathy for hours on end, although he was nervous about holding baby John. In five months there was only one mishap. On February 8, 1952--Neal's birthday--Carolyn contracted Bell's Palsy, a temporary facial paralysis, and Neal stayed in to care for her. Late that night, a drunken

Kerouac called Neal from a bar and told him he'd been "arrested," and to come and "bail me out." Their party was dull--they picked up a couple of Neal's women friends, played some strip poker, and ended up aimlessly but obstinately driving around all night. The next morning they roared into the house and Jack tried to smuggle his lady up to his room, scandalizing Carolyn, who protested at the foot of the stairs with her eye and mouth propped up with paperclips and her hair in curlers, as one of their visitors cursed her loudly and thoroughly. Neal and Jack stood embarrassed and silent until finally they took their guests home.

When Carolyn returned from the doctor's later that day, she found that the title page of her copy of The Town and the City had an addition from the author, a humble apology and a plea for forgiveness lumped with a promise that such a thing would never reoccur.

It didn't. The attic was satisfying and secure; he felt happy and his work went well. After a hard day's writing, Jack would descend from the attic to the kitchen to sip a small bottle of Tokay or Muscatel and talk companionably with Carolyn about his childhood, Memere, and Nin's contemptous attitude towards his work. "Get a job, ya bum," she said. He talked as well about his current work, a massive and experimental tome on Neal that he would call "Visions of Cody."

Jack and Carolyn were destined to become even closer.

One day, as Neal was on his way out on a two-week work trip, he stopped at the door, smiled, and in a tone full of meaning said "My best gal, and my best pal," and sped away. The two of them skirted each other like "penguins" during the next two weeks, but when her husband returned Carolyn pounced on him, demanding to know whether he had really meant that she and Jack should become lovers. "Well, ahem, ah-yes-ahh," burbled Cassady, "I thought it would be nice." At first Carolyn was insulted, but after a while she decided to do it--partly out of affection for Jack, mostly to spite Neal. On Neal's next absence she fixed pizza and wine, put the kids to bed early, and sat in the twilight talking with Jack about his coming summer's trip to Mexico and the strange mind of Burroughs. As "My Funny Valentine" came on the phonograph, Carolyn sat near Jack on the couch.

"Remember when we danced in Denver," she murmured, with a fond smile of recollection.

"Yeah," grinned Jack. "I wanted to take you away from Neal."

"Maybe you should have," was her reply.

It was quite a surprise to Jack, but he did not pass the opportunity to share Carolyn's remarkably graceful love, and they began an intermittent affair that lasted several months. Carolyn found him a "tender and considerate lover," though she still wanted Neal; certainly nothing they were doing was intended to break the marriage. In fact,

their affair brought the three of them peacefully close, the men competing for Carolyn's attention as they sat in the kitchen reading aloud from Proust or Shakespeare or work in progress while she cooked.[4]

Ultimately, Jack was in San Francisco to listen to his stoned brother Neal, whose mind, as Carolyn later observed, "would add extra dimensions to the enjoyment, swooping and soaring on wings of fancy, relating even small features or minor observations to a whole set of corresponding ideas in other areas of life, literature or the arts . . . comic strips, movie actors, fictional or historical figures came out of his mental file to be exposed in satire, humor or scorn, or to be given some relationship to the immediate scene."

Seated at his typewriter, Neal found himself "engulfed in ideas," paralyzed and drowning in a wave of possible words, but when he talked he was an authentic genius. Switching on his Ekotape recorder, the brothers sat stoned and jabbering for hours, listening to the music of Lady Day or the Bird as they swapped stories about the summer of 1947 in New Waverly or contemplated Jack's writing or perhaps shared a letter from Neal Sr. Their code words "mellow," "cool," and "energy" bespoke the pulse of their moods as they cherished each other's thoughts

and affection. The recording tape was like a kaleidiscope as it reflected the personality facets of the author and his subject discussing work in progress. As Neal strained to express himself, Jack struggled to grasp his brother absolutely, and their parallel efforts reached a penultimate logic when they analyzed Jack's transcription of the previous day's conversation. His choice of the word "demure" to describe Neal's expression catalyzed an exhaustive, spiraling dialogue that spun from what the choice signified about their relationship to writing and what Jack was attempting to do. Though they hardly knew it, they summed it all up when they sighed:

"You're not gonna get hardly any of this recorded, you know," Neal said.

"Well," Jack replied, "that's the sadness of it all."

Sad or not, Jack strove to leave behind a true record of his times: In an attempt to document his "Visions of Cody," he placed their taped conversations, dull as they sometimes were, at the work's center, an honest slice of life to ground his rhapsodies, for their talk was art too, communication, the intimacy of shared souls. As Allen later said, "the art lies in the consciousness of doing the thing, in the attention to the beginning in the sacramentalization of every-day reality, the God-worship in the present conversation, no matter what."

The previous summer, Neal had mischievously predicted

that future historians would have an intriguing time as they researched the period when Kerouac lived with Cassady and did his best work in the attic on Russell St. Cassady's bravado in comparing the possibilities to Gauguin and Van Gogh was perhaps a bit much, but he was right about Jack's work.[5] With the all night sound of his favorite bop disc jockey, Pat Henry of KJAZ, pouring out of the radio behind him, Jack slaved away on "Visions of Cody" at the enormous desk, a "crazy dumbsaint of the mind," as he later described himself, "like Proust an old teahead of time." Having shed his "literary, grammatical and syntactical inhibition[s]," he sat "in tranced fixation dreaming" upon his subject, relating "the true story of the world in interior monologue." The freedom and the trance and the agony yielded what Jack neatly described as "the unspeakable visions of the individual."

An attempt to transcend the nausea and despair of the times, "Visions of Cody" was a crucial existential act, the assertion of existence, a passionate commitment to artistic truth, to the possibilities of the unleashed human mind. For in his "visions" he tried, as he later said, to "begin not from preconceived idea of what to say about image but from jewel center of interest in subject of image at moment of writing and write outwards swimming in sea of language." Nineteen years after he began, Kerouac had, as Allen later put it, achieved "the ability to . . . write,

the way that you . . . are!" He was writing out of his deepest self now, a sinuous, unbroken flow of prose pouring out of his trance. His only source was "his body, his breath rhythm, his actual talk," Allen said--for language, he now fully realized, was speech first and above all; as a friend later added, "if you go to the library for it, you're getting it second hand." The spontaneous words took their own shape, organically, an evolved shape rather than an imposed form.[6]

"Visions of Cody" was an American monologue, something "like bop," thought Jack, "we're getting to it indirectly and too late, but completely from every angle except the angle we all don't know." Having shed the nervous Hammett-Burroughs staccato of "On the Road" for a natural speech pattern that suited his private brain-movie memory stock, he was "not so much concerned with events," wrote a friend, as "with consciousness, in which the ultimate events are images." He was free. Exultantly he wrote Holmes: "What I'm beginning to discover now is something beyond the novel and beyond the arbitrary confines of the story . . . into the realms of revealed picture . . . wild form, man, wild form . . . my mind is exploding to say something about every image and every memory . . . at this time in my life I'm making myself seek to find the wild form, that can grow with my wild heart . . . because now I know MY HEART DOES GROW."

A child again, pure, he wrote out his name and grade, "Jackie Kerouac, 6-B, Composition," and metaphorically tugged on Neal's sleeve--"now you're going to listen to me now, and let me tell the Story--" And then he began the last section of "Visions of Cody" (after the sketches, the tape, and the old section of young Neal in the poolhall), entitled "Imitation of the Tape." It was a fragmented, lunatic portrait of a fragmented, lunatic man--Neal. And it was a picture of America, too, for in Jack's mind Cassady and America were one. The "Imitation" was a surreal exposition of American culture with a B-movie motif--but "dream golden," Jack said, "not technicolor"--that included Bud Powell floating past Herman Melville, Moon Mullins and Papa Leo, baseball and Saroyan. Quite simply, it was "about the wonders of the world as it continually flashes up in retrospect," Jack thought, like Proust in that, but since Kerouac floated on waves of sound, dialect and puns, he tried to create images that surpassed "words with true instinctive communication."

Intellectually his message was the same as in The Town and the City, but now he expressed his sociological understanding of the American loss of community not in plot but in the perfect fused image of "the red brick wall behind the neons," the despair of solid wall behind the city's pleasantly inviting red lights, the grim reality of factory exploitation like Lowell's red brick mile of mills

that underlaid the modern glow of false light optimism and cheer. The only form was the shape of Jack's mind; said Allen later, "Mind is shapely, Art is shapely." The "Imitation" ranged from the literary history of New Orleans to playful games with American dialect, smoothly changing accents with a shift of word choice and pattern, modernizing Twain by inserting a joint in Huck's mouth to make the trip down the river all the more sweetly peaceful.[7]

One night Jack relaxed and sauntered about the steeply gracious streets of Russian Hill, and ran into some fellow image makers; a few blocks from Russell St., RKO Pictures was filming the movie Sudden Fear. Joan Crawford's repeated rehearsals of her scene meant only artifice and "form" to Jack, and he longed to tell her "you muster up a falsehood for money." The technicians who lounged outside the massive circle of lights made him see the film as "the Death of Hollywood . . . upon us," a clanking mechanical abomination of technique rather than inspiration, a machine that could produce only fraud. Sudden Fear was a bomb as a movie, but Jack's description of it--"Joan Rawshanks in the Fog" in "Visions of Cody"--was pure genius, possibly the best thing he ever did, recreating in thousands of details a panoramic consciousness of the fog swirling through the floodlight beams, Joan and her mink coat, the director, the crew, the wealthy tenants of the overlooking exclusive apartment building, the police as they held back the giddy teenage

girls who stared at the show, everything in fact, until the description became a separate but equal reality, as close to an actual experience on paper as humanly possible, down to the director's red lollipop. "Joan Rawshanks" was the "New Journalism" fifteen years early, a superb reproduction of observation, a mindreading of Crawford and her director as they blocked a scene, an intuiting of the crew's placid boredom, the exasperated impatience of a rich woman prevented from entering her home, the giggling nervousness of star-watching adolescents.

And then "Visions" returned to Neal, simultaneously a "Homeric warrior" and a member of the Three Stooges in his shredded pants stained with "baby food, come, ice cream, gasoline, ashes," one with Stooge Moe, "the leader, mopish, mowbry, mope-muffled, mealy-mad, hanking." The images of Jack's life floated to the surface of his mind, were depicted, pinned like a butterfly to the page, disappeared; memory to Jack was thought, creation, meditation and nostalgic self-knowledge all in one. As the manuscript progressed Kerouac retold the tales of the "On the Road" voyages of 1947-1950, and of his Neal, the "empty minded, vacant, bourgeois Irish proletarian would-be Proust tire recapper."

In March of 1952 it seemed as though Cassady was settling down to be a family man, and Jack mourned the world's loss of a psychic warrior intermingled with long

high chants to Melville and Whitman--his own prose masters--and beautiful prose poems like: "great spindly tin-like crane towers of the transterritorial electrical power wires standing in serried gloom . . ." Closing, he sang Neal home from Mexico City in 1950 with a paen to his large nature that compared him to Lester Young, the hippest cat of all, and then blew dirge for his encroaching bourgeois-ness, and America's, muted drum taps for Jack's loss, and the nation's. The last words were a hail and farewell for Neal, a blessing and an elegy: "Adios, King."[8]

Kerouac had reached a mental state in which his writing was very nearly a biological act, a pure experience of sensorium functioning, a meditation that operated through both the conscious and subconscious levels but was controlled by neither; as friend Michael McClure later wrote, he was

> an athlete
> of sense
> modalities
> and clarities
> and their inter-
> combinations.

Significantly, he was not alone. At roughly the same time and place and in response to the same stimuli--a world at once accelerating and constricting--the painter Jackson Pollock and the musician Charley Parker had

accomplished similar revolutions in their own art forms. The direct parallels of their lives were astonishing. All three men were working class sons of matrifocal families who refused to "adjust" to the conformist society of mid-century or the accepted styles in their forms, and for their efforts were falsely associated with violence and labelled psychopathic monsters. Each ignored the critical authorities in their field and stood naked before their audiences, gushing out an explosion of words, notes or paintdrops that was like the fiery rain of a volcano in eruption: The rain captured the hurtling reality of modern times in a luminous, delicately textured veil of particulars that depicted the universal with singular expressions of the self.

Jack's link with Charles "Bird" Parker was overt, since he consciously modeled his writing after Parker's magnificent music. Gems like Bird's "Klactoveededstene," "Ornithology," or "Groovin' High" were the products of a seminal mind concerned with expressing two things; as technically sophisticated as his music was, Bird played with the raw energy of a high power line, and it was that stabbing electricity that Jack had attempted to put into "On the Road," that mortal sense that the candle must burn furiously, else the times will surely snuff it out. Secondly, Parker blew from the roots of Afro-American music, from rhythm, and from rhythm, speed, improvising an ever more fluid melody with

faster and faster notes until the front row of his audience was awash in the sounds that expressed what a later critic called his "naked passion and hurtling, uninhibited romanticism."

The tunes themselves were spontaneous improvisations on old pop tunes, worn fragments plucked from a dying culture and re-energized. Parker's art had affinity for Jack's not only in their transmutation of the old culture, but in their concern for the human voice. When Bird blew he sang, the man and his horn were one, the reed and keys and chamber of his saxophone only an extension--like a typewriter--of his voice and mind, sounding out a style that was profoundly like speech in its inflection and phrasing. Listening to Bird--and he did so constantly--Jack felt myriad connections of subject, style, and approach, and tried to reflect that aural perfection in his own prose.

Privately, Bird resembled Neal, for he was surely one of the few addicts in history who retained an insatiable appetite for sex, food, and drink. Spontaneity was Bird's conscious goal as well, for America was a "down trip, man," and he wanted to break the psychic bonds both for himself as an individual, and because "the style was not a style, but the man himself," for his art. Hurtling deep out of his consciousness came a deluge of sounds--human sounds--that he used to try to crack America apart.[9]

The third member of this creative trio was the rogue

king of American painting, Jackson Pollock. Shortly before Pollock made his breakthrough to "drip" painting, which involved resting the canvas on the floor and the use of a hardened brush held just above the canvas to spatter the paint, he put into note form the general idea of what he was attempting.

Technic is the result of a need --
new needs demand new technics ----------
total control ----- denial of
the accident ----------
states of order ------
organic intensity ---------
energy and motion
made visible ----------
memories arrested in space,
human needs and motives ----------
acceptance -----

Though the fine arts were never one of Jack's major preoccupations, he recognized Pollock as an "artist of genius" in an article written several years later; had he discovered these notes in 1952, he would have encountered a full blown brother who shared not only agonies alleviated only by alcohol, but a virtually identical aesthetic, another artist who wanted to stand in his work totally naked and confessional, romantically expressing his self and, as Pollock put it in a later note, the "Experience of our age in terms of painting--not an illustration of--(but the equivalent.)" Like Jack, he sought not form but a way to explore his emotional and sensual universe. His wife, the painter Lee Krassner, wrote that "He sensed rhythm rather

than order." The canvases, the records, the growing stack of manuscript pages were merely captured moments that revealed a process, a rendering of an artistic consciousness spontaneously at work: Blue Poles or Autumn Rhythm or Eyes in the Heat were great paintings and yet something else, for the paintings were but a "concrete metaphor," as Pollock's biographer later wrote, "in which the subject is the act of painting."

Pollock too had recoiled from the new order defined by the war--or for him, by Picasso's Guernica--and conceived of cosmic methods, spontaneous approaches that accepted "accident" as part of the whole, and organically depicted energy, rhythm and motion, "memories arrested in space." With Neal, he shared western origins, a love for high speed driving, raging energy and attractiveness to women. Like Jack he was a shy man who hid behind alcohol, adored baseball, frequented the most proper occasions in the most bedraggled dress, said of jazz that it was "the only creative thing happening in this century," and was essentially a sensous Puritan fascinated by the perverse.

Though all three artists were intelligent, their approaches were as much of the senses as of the mind, and each man performed with a savage physical intensity. Pollock spoke of being "in the painting," and Jack and Bird sometimes lost ten pounds after a spectacular night of creation. All three were labelled undisciplined, explosive; it seemed to

the critical mentality that their stormy spontaneity was somehow too easy. Each artist had concluded that in the gangrenous limbo of war and cold war, only the most colossally risky commitment to personal intuition, to the act of creativity, to life and to art as life-expression could possibly allow them to transcend the times. "Mind is shapely," Allen later said--and words or notes or paint-drops that expressed that mind could become great art when one had worked on the basics for twenty years, so that the arc separating mind and medium was shortened to nothingness.

So Pollock stood at the center of the canvas dappling himself down; Bird blew high, higher, into the smoky night; and Jack wrote on. At a time of hydrogen bombs, biological warfare, and Viking rockets, their models were not scientists but sorcerors, their approach not intellectual but sensual, their goals not aesthetic but religious. Those who sank deeply enough into the vortex of "Groovin' High" or Blue Poles or "Visions of Cody" found themselves finally in awareness of an infinite universe, wordless, silent, and dark.[10]

In March Jack completed his unpublishably honest masterpiece "Visions of Cody" and put it away in his duffel bag. Three months later he reached his aesthetic peak in a new book, the story of the "Myth of the Rainy Night" and Dr. Sax, which he came to call "Dr. Sax." "Dr. Sax," Allen said, was the penultimate attainment of the "perfect exec-

utive conjunction of archetypal memorial images articulating present observation of detail and childhood epiphany fact." By then Kerouac was with Burroughs in Mexico, but his physical location hardly mattered. In the three weeks he spent on "Dr. Sax"--he had taped a one hour precis in San Francisco, but wrote it later--he was in a timeless zone of recall, a Faustian sink of infinity where he muttered and exclaimed and chanted over the shards of his childhood and his life.

"Sax" was a meld of several elements: The 1948 dream of his boyhood imitation "Shadow" companion Dr. Sax, who visited Lowell to destroy the world snake of evil; a satire on New York intellectuals in the characters "Amadeus Baroque" and "Count Condu"; and Jack's immediate atmosphere in the snake and eagle symbols of modern Mexico. Above all, it was a transcendental recapitulation of childhood, a Faustian probing of growing up, the summation of what Sax had told his boyhood alter ego: "You'll come to death, civilization, sociology, solitude, nightmares, old age, maturity, but you'll never be as happy as you are now in your quietish innocent book-devouring boyhood immortal night."

The seed of the vision was a dream of a certain "wrinkly tar" street corner in Pawtucketville, and as Jack said, "memory and dream are intermixed in this mad universe." Myth was an element as well, for Kerouac passed from a second version of the opening description of the

Merrimack River--so much more sensitive now to the dark currents of time than in The Town and the City--to his own birth: "I was born. Bloody rooftop. Strange deed." His memory exfoliating like Melville's onion, he peeled through the layers--GJ, "Destouches" the dissipated candy man, drunken priests, child funerals, cartoons and coal "(now it's atom-bomb bins in the cellar communist dope rings)," the flood of 1936, Memere and Leo and then the myth of the rainy night. High above his birthplace on Lupine Road, higher even than the Boott Shoe Mill's smoke stack, "sat" a castle inhabited by one Count Condu, an improvisation on Bela Lugosi and "part of a general movement of evil." Up the road to Lowell trudged Dr. Sax, pool partner to "Old Bull Balloon"--W. C. Fields--gleeful alchemist and river pilot, seeking "the enigma of the New World--the snake of evil." "Sax" was about "something secretively wild and baleful in the glares of the child soul, the masturbatory surging triumph of the knowledge of reality," about "laying in pissy mattresses playing with our ding dongs," about the sounds of eternity Jack sought to replicate, gibberish on the surface, yet a madly sensible gibberish.[11]

Neal's beloved Proust affected it stylistically, Melville's Confidence Man and Finnegan's Wake as well, and even the wild dancing finish of Disney's 1950 Alice in Wonderland, which Jack had seen the night before he began to write.

The myth of absolute evil swelled and grew, flashed past Aztec sacrifice and Trader Horn white hunter racism to the camping dilettantes Amadeus Baroque and Count Condu as they postured in the castle. The tale fell away like a spurting fountain, dissolving from a realistic description of the 1936 flood to the fictional Jacky's discovery of a seminal gray dove returning from the Himalayas for the final assault on evil.

Jacky and Sax slipped invisibly through Lowell's silent dream streets, past Mayan spiders and Chimu centipedes, into the Pit; in a preposterously thrilling climax, Sax invoked his powers and charms, and failed. Evil endured. Glum amid the hellish smokeclouds, Sax sat ordinary again, having discovered that "nothing works in the end . . . the universe doesn't care what happens to mankind." Spawned of Freudian symbolism, Aztec mythology, and more importantly Keroucian vision, a giant eagle enshrouded by white doves swept out of the sky, seized the snake, and carried it off: Jack and Sax realized that "the universe disposes of its own evil."

"Sax" was also about America, as Sax said, "a dense Balzacian hive in a jewel point," and at the center of that jewel there was a horrible flaw. "--Something that can't possibly come back again in America and history," Jack wrote, "the gloom of the unaccomplished mud heap civilization when it gets caught with its pants down from a source it

long ago lost contact with--[nature]."

Jack had cleaved his soul for his vision, pierced the veil of time and seen hell, blown as deeply as ever he could. There would be no more life pivots for him that he could truly control, only developments and changes, "losses and exasperations," as John Holmes would later say, further choruses. "Sax" was the exorcism, the total legend of Lowell, the life catharsis; Kerouac had burned, burned, burned . . . and now he had to wait.[12]

Before he left Russell St. for Mexico in May, Jack had to endure a spring filled with the delicious agony of possibly selling "On the Road." Allen's old madhouse friend Carl Solomon was an editor--his uncle, A. A. Wynn, was owner--of the New York paperback publisher Ace Books, and Ginsberg had become everyone's agent. Allen had already sold Burroughs' narcotic autobiography "Junkie," and was encouraging Neal to work on his own autobiography, "The First Third." Most of Ginsberg's energy was devoted to selling "On the Road" and the twenty thousand words on young Neal in the poolhall, which at the time was lumped with it. (Later it would be part of "Visions of Cody.") But in addition to being a rather prickly character, Carl Solomon had extremely fixed ideas about literary style, thought "Cody" was unpublishable,

and bluntly said so. Allen blamed the rejection on office politics, and wrote in his April journal, "I think Jack is the greatest writer alive in America of our own age--yet Harcourt (Giroux) rejected his first as being too personal and subjective . . . and now this second version seems to them a garble of unrelated free associations. I think I'll stick with Jack."

Hungering to see his genius friend recognized, Allen resembled Holmes, who wrote, "so passionately did I long for his work to be given the recognition it deserved, that sometimes I caught myself wishing he would blunt the edge of it a little toward that end"; Allen tried to mollify Carl and urged Jack to be more cooperative. Utterly certain that he had attained his peak, that in future years he would be astonished and regretful that he could not continue at such a level, Jack wondered jokingly if he might be headed for a breakdown, and refused to consider changing a single word.

Literary politics sickened him with envy. Holmes had finished his "Beat" novel "Go" and sold it to Charles Scribner's Sons. Allen felt the editor was a "Whore! Whore! Whore!", though Holmes had treated himself no better than anyone else in the book. Jealous and frustrated, Jack condemned Holmes as an interloper and exploiter of their legitimate literary movement, composed of Jack, Allen, Neal, Bill, and Huncke.

His other correspondence from New York reported that Memere was being plagued with visits from police and the Brooklyn District Attorney's Uniform Support of Dependents Bureau; Jack's unseen child named Janet was haunting the Kerouacs. Holmes had separated from his wife Marion. Their marriage had been a great symbol of stability to the circle of friends, and everyone was disturbed by the divorce. Jack urged John to try to patch it up, and to hit the road if he couldn't. Even more upsetting than divorce was the suicide of Phil "Sailor" White, Burroughs' old subway pal. White had informed on former accomplices to get off a murder charge, and while imprisoned in the Tombs he was exposed as a traitor. Convinced that he'd never live through his sentence at Riker's Island prison, he had hanged himself.[13]

The only pleasant news concerned Allen. Then nearing the age of twenty-six, he continued to lurk among the subterraneans of New York, even as he felt that he "should be more connected to outside things, like $ and society." He dreamed of marrying his new woman friend Dusty Morland, though he lacked the love or money. But his poetry (later published as "Empty Mirror") was flowing, and in late February he received a wonderful letter from William Carlos Williams, the master poet of Rutherford, New Jersey, assuring him that he would be the center of the new Paterson Poem, and that "You must have a book. I shall see that you

get it." The poems, "eavesdroppings on my consciousness," were brief, gloomy introspections on his spiritual odyssey; the title was a specific symbol to that end.[14] Jack was paternally proud of Allen's success, even though the optimism proved false, and the book was not published for several years. Though he'd never read Dr. Williams, Kerouac used him as a springboard for advancing his theory of spontaneous prose to Allen, the first of a series of hundreds of lectures about the virtue of the first "wild" thought.

All the friends had grown closer that spring, as Jack had encouraged Carolyn to write to Allen, and their new correspondence had mellowed both of them, Carolyn assuring Ginsberg, "You are the wisest of men--in truth, as Jack says, a mystic genius." Neal also wrote Allen, inviting him to the attic to "make love to wife and me--"

All told, his passage with the Cassadys had been a good one. Jack had even spent some time as a yard clerk for the Southern Pacific Railroad, learning about switches and boxcars, making a little money as he acquired a valuable skill. The high point of the spring came when a friend of Neal's named Philip Lamantia had given them some peyote. Allen was particularly thrilled to hear about it, because he'd read Lamantia's surrealist poetry--written at the age of fourteen--in Andre Breton's magazine View. Though they later boasted of their new experiences in sensa-

tion seeking to him, it had been an unimpressive trip; perhaps they hadn't eaten enough.

To be sure, there were squabbles in the Russell St. house. The Cassadys wanted a suburban home to raise their children, and as Neal worked double shifts and they pinched pennies for a mortgage down payment, hobo-artist Kerouac felt estranged from their plans. His creative fantasyland was far distant from marriage and stability.

In May 1952, the Cassadys dropped Jack off in Nogales on their way to Tennessee to visit Carolyn's family and show off the children to their grandparents. Jack's wallet was limp but his bag was beginning to fill with more and more of what he knew was his best writing, and he was full of literary plans. While in Mexico, he wanted to portray Burroughs as he'd just envisioned Neal. After returning to New York he would write a book on "The Mysteries of America" that focused on Lester Young, who with the Mississippi River seemed to epitomize the nation's spiritual greatness.

Otherwise, it was good to be temporarily free from his native land. More and more, it was beginning to choke up, to calcify, as Neal seemed to be doing with his money and mortgage worries. Modern concrete super highways, like the just-opened New Jersey Turnpike, were starting to replace the cracked tar two-laners that Jack had known. The past Christmas, America had seemed "so big, so sad, so bleak" to him, "like the leafs of a dry summer that go crinkly ere

August found its end, [it's] hopeless . . ." Swaying on the bus to Mexico City, Jack had pencil and paper, and was anything but hopeless; he also had his writer's soul.[15]

CHAPTER IX

AMONG THE FELLAHEENS OF MEXICO AND MANHATTAN

> The problem of the 20th Century will be the problem of the color line.
>
> W. E. B. DuBois

"My name is Enrique," said the brown young man sitting next to Kerouac on the Mexico City-bound bus. "And this is my brother Gerardo." Jack was a little lonely; the Russell St. attic had been a haven of peace and security for him, and now he was adrift again. He reached out gratefully for the proffered friendship, and their conversation warmed. Enrique shifted in his seat, then showed him the radio sitting in his lap. It was hollowed out, its tubes and circuits replaced by half a pound of ripe green marijuana. "You wanna get high?" Enrique whispered, subtly, with the demure, inquiring look of non-violent hipsters when they identify a fellow member of their underground. Jack was delighted to share the wealth, and the three of them spent a bus lay-over in Sinaloa with Indian friends of Enrique's.

They smoked grass and opium until Kerouac sat transfixed in a dream world, listening to their Indian host lecture on revolution--a mad, mystic revolution that the political types back in Union Square New York could never comprehend. "We'll take the snake out of the woods!" their host exclaimed. "We'll tear the wings off the great bird! We shall live in the iron houses overturned in fields of rags!"

For they were--as Jack realized in a sudden insight that cut through the warm drug haze that swirled about him--all Roman Catholics, and that link was a rich one, deeper and more binding than any political dogma. He squatted in his dirty bare feet on the dirt floor of the hut in Sinaloa, thinking that "the earth is an Indian thing," and that he was one of Oswald Spengler's "world citizens, world pacifists, world reconcilers," a Metropolitan man of the north come to listen to the peasants, to experience what he called the "Fellaheen feeling of life, that timeless gaiety of people not involved in great cultural and civilization issues." To Jack, the Indians in front of his bedazzled eyes were the people of the pure land.[1]

He approached the campesinos with affection and respect, saw them not as clownish "Panchos" like the later "Frito Bandido" but as people in touch with elemental life truths long desiccated out of the U.S. by the technocracy. Like the Afro-American culture he had studied for twenty years, there was something ancient and fine, enduring above all, about the Indians. On his previous expedition to Mexico he had watched people silently lust after Neal's beat-up old car, and had mourned their materialism, for they did not know of the atomic bomb that obsessed him, the nuclear demon that could destroy all of the toys of America-Babylon, so that, he thought, "we would be as poor as they someday, and stretching out our hands in the same,

same way." In Jack's eyes, Enrique and Gerardo and their host were part of "the essential strain of the basic primitive wailing humanity that stretches in a belt around the equatorial belly of the world." As Neal told Allen, Jack was "with the Indians permanent."

As he listened to the village's "African world Fellaheen sound" or bounced on the bus among the chickens and goats, singing bop tunes like "Scrapple from the Apple," Jack saw the U.S. as something far away, an ugly but insubstantial cloud above the Rio Grande.[2] But the cloud was mushroom shaped. As Jack left for Mexico City, the Atomic Energy Commission demonstrated a nuclear explosion in Yucca Flat, Nevada, thrilling some thirty-five million Americans who watched it on television at home. The other prominent scientific news featured the product chlorophyll, which was sweeping the U.S. deodorant market in the ongoing American war against body odor. Control was the essence of America, but it was a subtle, gentle, invisible control. On the political level, the Republicans chose the blandly optimistic Dwight Eisenhower before millions of Americans in the first widely televised Presidential nominating convention. If only in memory of Leo, Jack liked Taft; Allen backed his fellow New York Democrat Averill Harriman. Neal's comment was to the point: "It makes not one whit of difference."

The political system had reached a quiescent, placid

consensus, and party labels in the new technocracy were as irrelevant as buggy whips. After twenty long years "out," the Republicans brayed loudly of change and altered nothing when they assumed power. No less than the "liberal" bureaucratic Democrats, they were locked into a control system of large scale unions, mature corporations with a monopoly on expertise, supervised education and the increasingly well planned organization of almost everything. Senator Joseph McCarthy flailed about silencing dissent and debate, eight-tenths of American aid to Western Europe was military in nature, the Cold War turned the 1952 Helsinki Olympics into an athletic battlefield "won" on the last day by the U.S.A., and the war in Korea ground on, devouring more and more victims while the old men on either side waited for the "right" moment to stop. Negotiations had dragged through a year by 1952, but the only use served by the little hut marked with a spotlight at Panmunjon was to give a border reference point to night reconnaisance patrols.

When they read, Americans enjoyed religion, something pretty and fine, but not too close to home; Moses by Sholem Asch, or The Cardinal, or Michener's entertaining Return to Paradise. War stories were still popular: The Cruel Sea, or From Here to Eternity, or best of all, Herman Wouk's The Caine Mutiny, which succinctly taught the lesson of the times; don't buck the system. The novel's

villain--the legal, though utterly mad chief authority--won his court martial, and the virtuous men who challenged him were forced out of the Navy. Organization was the American reference point, and even something as shiny new as rock and roll was subject to it. That summer, a Cleveland disc jockey named Alan Freed had invented the term "rock and roll," but the music was then under the technical and commercial domination of Atlantic Records producer Jesse Stone, who had conceived the fundamental chord changes that made rock out of rhythm and blues. It would be three years before a genius named Chuck Berry would arise to set the music free. Teamwork was everything, and though Americans wistfully cherished the lone gallantry of Gary Cooper in _High Noon_, they knew better than to try anything like it in real life; after twenty years of depression, war, and atomic cold war terror, Americans were realists.[3]

As Jack saw it, the U.S. was only laws _against_, not laws _for_, and being in Mexico was as exhilarating as playing hooky. His bus slowly crunched two thousand miles down the spine of the continent, past the sea of Mazatlan and red plains dotted with wild burros and horses. Kerouac sat by his dozing compadres and nursed his worries. Terrified at somehow being pursued by the New York Police over the divorce, he was also unsure of how Burroughs had survived his own recent agonies.

Nine months before, on a hot and drunken day in September of 1951, Joan and Bill had entertained two G.I.s from Florida--Edwin Woods and Lewis Marker--in their Mexico City apartment. Supposedly Joan teased Bill into shooting a glass of gin off her head William Tell-style. Certainly Bill was obsessed with hand guns, and Joan's death wish was legendary. The month before, Allen and Lucien had visited Mexico (Jack's phlebitis attack had prevented him from going along), and Allen had been terrified at Lucien and Joan's insanely drunken driving. In any case, there was a gun, a .38 revolver. Bill fired it, and it killed Joan.

The newspapers were pleased with a juicy story; the Daily News blared "Heir's Pistol Kills His Wife: He Denies Playing William Tell," and presented Burroughs as a "wealthy Texas cotton grower" held on murder charges. Given the realities of Mexician justice, it was no surprise that Bill managed to avoid prison, but he was temporarily confined to the country.

Shortly before Jack arrived, Bill's spirits crumpled like a man kicked squarely in the crotch. Burroughs' sexuality was no simple thing. He had once boastfully written to Allen that "I have been laying women for the past 15 years and haven't heard any complaints from the women either," and Joan had graced the letter's margin with the word "correct." Allen's agonized plaints about gay life

elicited Burroughs' comment that "the problems and difficulties you complain of in queer relationships are social rather than inherent resulting from the social environment (to my mind one of the worst in Space-Time) of middle class U.S.A." In the desolate backwash of Joan's death, though, Bill had taken up with Lewis Marker and fallen in love with him. Marker was unmoved. Jack had once written of Bill that he had left his "sexuality back somewhere in the opium road," and certainly his dry, intellectualized vision of Bill ignored the fleshly realities. When Marker grew to dislike Mexico and returned to the United States, Bill suffered like every human caught in unfulfilled love, writing Marker multiple, unanswered letters. Like every artist, Burroughs tried to salvage the pain with a new work, to be called "Queer."[4]

Burroughs had begun to write two years before in 1950 because there had been "nothing else to do," but in time he had become engulfed by his art. His first book, "Junkie," was a generally straightforward description of his drug life; Allen had sold it to Ace Books that March. As a result, Bill's letters were increasingly devoted to prose techniques, and his comments on "Visions of Cody" were perceptive and precise. He wrote in April that "the excerpts from your novel sound mighty fine. Of course, the Finnegan's Wake kind of thing can be fully appreciated only in context of the whole work, which in the case of

this kind of writing more than any other is an actual amoeba like organism." With that sort of sensible encouragement, Jack arrived in Mexico City anticipating stimulation and another book, having warned Allen not to tell Bill and make him self conscious about being a subject.

Kerouac hurried to Burroughs' place at 212 Orizaba Street, and after two and a half years it was good to see his old friend once more. Jack was mildly upset when Bill swiftly steered him away from Enrique, but Burroughs was supporting him, and he let it go. The scion of St. Louis was a deranged genius to Jack, but with beautiful innocent blue eyes, and their conversations were deep. It had been seven years since Bill had been Jack's mentor, but the younger man still listened attentively to the breadth of view expressed in Bill's dry flat tones. The previous year Jack had assured Allen that he still regarded himself as a Burroughsian Factualist, in the spirit of clarity and lack of preconceptions, and in a worldview spawned of the one great fact of death; dying--the end of time--was of the essence, and before that event Jack was exactly equal to all living creatures. Kerouac's occasional querulous disgust with life Burroughs dismissed with wisdom. When Jack complained of Holmes, Burroughs replied, as he had once written a similarly disposed Allen, that "Envy or resentment is only possible when you can not see your own space-time location."

Bill was equally impressed with Jack and the new book, informing Allen that "He has developed unbelievably. He really has a tremendous talent." Enjoying Bill's sourly witty, outrageously misogynist harangues, Jack smoked grass and typed up--revising as he went--"Visions of Cody," then sent it off to Allen, his "agent." Stoned and peaceful, he joined Bill at the ballet, and also indulged himself sexually with a "splendid" Mexican whore and an expatriate American woman.[5] Drugs were at the center of his stay at Orizaba Street. Morphine, Bill's current kick, was freely available; Burroughs had a Board of Health permit that allowed him seven grams a month for thirty dollars. Despite his seven years experience with hard drugs, Bill was still astonishingly subject to bum trips with junk. "I got the horrors," he wrote, hallucinating a face corrupted with disease that melted "into an ameboid mass in which the eyes floated."

Faces loomed before him, leading, he said, "to the final place where the human road ends, where the human form can no longer contain the crustacean horror that has grown inside it." When he and Jack ate peyotl a couple of times early in June, Bill launched into an insane monologue about being a prisoner: "Ah, I feel awful, I feel worse than if I was suddenly a prisoner in the High Andes, a penalist . . ." The Mexico City hip scene's atmosphere began to come unglued. An old Harvard friend of Bill's named Kells Elvins had been arrested on drug charges, and

the paranoia was sufficient for Bill to order Jack not to smoke marijuana in the house; the smell had spooked him. More discreet drugs retained their popularity, and the Orizaba Street flat was a popular scene for the hip set of the city, refugee American hipsters like "Wig," a bop bassist who had played with some of the best California jazzmen, including Art Pepper, Hampton Hawes, and Shelly Manne. Wig was one of Bill's customers, and brought not only dope money but a present, a small but rich stack of the best jazz records around.

Between visits to the bullfights or Lola's Bar, Jack plunked himself down in the only private place, Bill's toilet seat, took out his nickel notebook, and in three weeks spilled onto paper a vision of his marble-playing childhood as seen from the shroud, "Dr. Sax." His writing was as darkly beautiful as a jungle at dawn, figurative sunlight dappling twisted vines of snakey words. It was not only ancient memory but present reality; Burroughs' dry, waspish humor tinged much of the book, and even more literally, the story reeked of a rich dripping sexuality. While his money lasted, Jack was actively making the rounds of Oregano Street's brothels, where a "date" cost him 36¢. Returning to the cool tile cell of his meditations, he would stoke his creative fires with clouds of marijuana and begin to write. Though it was only the second time he'd seriously attempted to write while high, he was somehow in

enough control to make of "Dr. Sax" a masterpiece, his language rolling subtle and loose, his guilts and glee transmuted into a wonderful prose study of the magic space between shadow and light.[6]

Despite the fact that "Sax" was as wildly unpublishable as "Cody," Jack was euphoric with his new victory and bursting with ideas for new books. He planned a series of sketches on Bill Burroughs and the Fellaheen Mexican Indians, then thought he might do a Civil War novel, though it would have to await a better library. Somewhat more realistically, he warned John Holmes not to do a novel about jazz, and outlined his ideas for a book to be entitled "Hold Your Horn High." Part One, "Afternoon of a Tenorman," would focus on Lester Young, Jack's Horace Mann friend Seymour Wyse, and the Swing Era, while Part Two would feature Neal and Slim Gaillard. The third section centered on Al Sublette, a black sailor-hipster-drinking buddy from Jack's previous stay in San Francisco, a "Down Stud, Pops," whose favorite expression was "Blow baby blow!" Jack told John that he would close the book with a chapter about "The Heroine of the Hip Generation"; Lady Day, of course.

Through mid-June he was ecstatic, aglow with post-creative plans, anticipating a South American quest after drugs and mystery with Bill, then a merchant voyage or two to earn enough to buy a trailer so that Memere could settle in Nin's back yard. Then, gibbering the most paradaisical

image of life in any locale since William Jennings Bryan sold Florida, he and the Cassadys would settle together in Mexico City, where life was cheap and wonderful. In four months, Jack promised, Neal could earn enough on the Southern Pacific Railroad to support his family for a year below the border, with filet mignon at sixty cents a pound, rent for a nice home with garden and fireplace at twenty-seven dollars monthly, cigarettes at six cents a pack, and bus fare from the border to Mexico City at six dollars.

Toward the end of his stay in San Francisco, Jack had run "into a blank wall" in Neal, seen him as indifferent, like a patronizing elder brother who would no longer answer his younger brother's questions. Kerouac cheered quickly when Caroline assured him of Neal's sustained concern for him, shrugged off their lapse in communication as mere posturing on Cassady's part, and continued his selling job, trying to soothe the Cassady's marital problems by offering Neal the whores, fruit, weather, good and high times of Mexico City. Neal was jealous, albeit very confusedly, of Jack's recent affair with Carolyn, but Kerouac counseled him from the long perspective of his own imagined death. Seen from the grave, jealousy was an empty abstraction: Having confronted death, Jack announced that he would accept with gratitude an opportunity to share in someone's life, but he recognized that the only result would be a grave. Better, he crooned to Neal, to stay high and accept

eternity in the warm beauty of Mexico City, and for them all to love each other the way human beings could.

In late June, though, Jack's vibrant mood collapsed from a series of souring events. First there was a letter from Allen Ginsberg, who was toiling in the New York fields of commerce, trying to sell books while all of his friends roamed free. Allen desperately wanted to escape the city, but was "terrified of going into the night again, toward death maybe, or an oblivion beyond the pale tenderness of New York daily life," and was sure that "all would die . . . if I weren't around to clean up messes." From New York he wrote Jack his own opinion of "Visions of Cody." "I don't see how it will ever be published," Allen groaned, "it's so personal, it's so full of sex language, so full of our local mythological references." He went on: "The language is great, the blowing is mostly great," the sketches were "the best that is written in America," but "It's crazy. (not merely inspired crazy) but unrelated crazy." Ginsberg felt that Jack still hadn't caught Neal, only himself, and mixed the chronology too much, so that the surreal end sections were "juss crappin around . . . just a hangup." Allen even challenged Jack's motives; "What are you trying to put down, man?"

To Neal in San Francisco he was even more explicit. "Visions of Cody," he wrote Cassady, was "a holy mess--it's

great all right, but he did everything he could to fuck it up with a lot of meaningless bullshit I think, page after page of surrealist free association that don't make sense to anybody except someone who has blown Jack." Frustrated by his "business" role, Allen wondered, "why is he tempting rejection and fate? fucking spoiled child . . . it ain't right to take on so paranoic just to challenge and see how far you can go."[7]

Allen was caught in an impossible situation; he had wangled a small advance from Ace Books based on the style of the young Neal in the pool hall segment, and the rest of "Visions of Cody" was radically different. Not only had his star author pulled an aesthetic tantrum, Allen reflected, but Carl Solomon--Ginsberg's only connection to the publishing world--was presently incapable of confident literary or business judgement due to a spectacular nervous breakdown.

Solomon had left his wife, attacked books with knives, stopped traffic by hurling his briefcase and shoes at cars, flooded his apartment and smeared its walls with paint, and landed in Bellevue Psychiatric Wing. Carl, who wrote of himself, "I have not been mad / But merely a prophet, without profit motive," also announced, "I wasn't sure which it was, this reality or the other one, and there are so many realities . . ." He used that sort of shifting psychic gears in his business letters as well as his poetry, rendering

commerce difficult indeed.

His first letter to Kerouac began with a fascinating lecture on the cosmic meaning of the zinc penny, "loss of respect for authority, the second war, demonism, the atomization of the American petit bourgeois," progressed to a discourse on American writers as gays--"Here writers are trade and editors are aunties"--dismissed The Town and the City as repressed homosexuality, brusquely informed Jack that he was acting like an "undertipped head waiter" and thoroughly dressed him down for the crass philistinism of hiring an agent. Early in 1952 he suggested Jack do a picture book on bop, but the idea never bloomed. While Jack was in the Russell St. attic, Solomon's letters were usually abusive, calling Jack a "jackass" for offering to produce a book in a month when A. A. Wynn had offered a two year contract. The original 21-day "On the Road" was "work shirking" to Carl, and Jack's personality with publishers was a "nasty, stupid, worthless, idiot-brat son of a royal house" pose.[8]

Jack's writing came from a source deeper than intellect, deeper than emotion; it came from his spirit. His art was so revealing in its stark intimacy that there was almost no feasible distinction between art and artist; to Kerouac, an attack on his work translated as a devastatingly absolute rejection. Yet his reply to Allen's criticisms was gentle, a murmur about some Blake dreams he'd just had, a quiet, wry

suggestion that he might very well be going insane, but was closer to salvation for it. Nevertheless, he thought "Visions of Cody" a work of genius comparable to Ulysses, and he refused to consider the remotest possibility of cuts or revisions.

Life pitched downward. By late June, Jack was deeply depressed, awash in his failures; he was thirty years old, had sixty cents to his name, a wife who wanted to jail him, a never-to-be-seen daughter, a mother still working, three books no one would publish, and the sad mushy feeling of holes in his shoes. Thieves had stolen his raincoat and ten dollars Memere had sent him. Worst of all, his poverty had generated a war with Bill regarding the division of food. Burroughs' money was committed to his legal expenses--his advance from Ace was only $180.00 anyway--and he couldn't support Jack, who had developed a habit, when two rolls remained on the table, of immediately gobbling both. Frantic, Kerouac wrote to Carolyn begging for a loan, but received no reply; the letter had been delayed. According to Bill, he was "usually surly and ill-tempered," "insufferable," and "paranoid," and persisted in smoking grass in the flat, an undiplomatic gesture for the guest of a man negotiating his way out of murder charges. Actually, Bill was fed up with Mexico, and had decided to go to Panama, then Peru, looking for a new drug called "Yage," an "uncut kick that opens out instead of narrowing down like junk"; perhaps it

was, Bill hoped, "the final fix."

Desolate and bone tired, his energy sapped by the grim futility of his struggle with the publishing world, his responsibilities as a son unfulfilled and his friends having apparently deserted him, Jack fled to holy sanctuary in a little church, where he prayed deeply for succor. Contemplating the tender Catholic crucifix in an Aztec land of blood rites and savagery, he begged Christ and the Blessed Virgin and Leo and Gerard for help, screamed mental supplication for some blessing. The penitents who inched on their knees toward the altar reassured him, affirming Fellaheen patience and fortitude as he tried to convince himself that life was but a dream and death, that things didn't matter so much as he was allowing them to. Bit by bit, the quiet dignity of the church seeped into his frenzy and left him a measure of faith, and he walked out of the cool shadows and into the harsh sun a more tranquil man. Bill grumbled and groaned when Jack asked to borrow twenty dollars for bus fare, but conceded to Allen, "We are good friends . . . so I guess I have to forgive him," and Jack rode the bus back to North Carolina and family.[9]

After a few of Memere's meals he grew bored with North Carolina and briefly visited New York; on July 18th he and Allen stood talking on the corner of 14th St. and 8th

Avenue. Jack was tanned, in good physical shape, and even well dressed, a pleasant departure from his usual wrung-out retreats from adventure. But he struck Allen as tired, vacant, his attention straying. Both of them were frustrated. Their conversation wandered; he was planning, Jack told Allen, to watch the Republican Convention on TV the next day, though it was a bit meaningless to him; "We are but poor people." Idly scratching his mosquito bites, Jack gloomily agreed with his "little brother" that there was "no hope" in their lives, that they were empty of all but the physical appetites, and their crucial desire--for love--was unfulfilled. "No," Jack said, shrugging his shoulders as he headed toward the subway stop, "We thought we were alive but we weren't ever."

The feeling of emptiness stayed with him on his bus ride to North Carolina, and Rocky Mount proved even more depressing than usual, as Nin bitched at him to get a job and Memere grumbled about his choice of friends, especially black Al Sublette. Gabrielle clipped articles on rape and shoved them at him, hissing about "his" "niggers." So poor and so blank that he could hardly conceive of a positive destination, Jack might well have come dangerously close to unraveling but for a letter from the Cassadys. Their relationship had foundered without Kerouac as balance wheel, and Neal enticed him to return with the promise of a railroad brakeman's job, enclosing an S.P. brakeman's button and

some old receipts that permitted him to ride the rails west.

At first, California was grand. Neal was at work when Jack called the Cassady house for a ride from the San Jose train station--the Cassadys had moved to San Jose, seventy miles south of San Francisco, and their huge new house included a room especially reserved for Jack--and Carolyn welcomed him with a memorably passionate necking session before he had managed to cross the threshold of his new home. Home. The children dragged him about their nice big yard, Carolyn served pizza and wine and occasionally shared her bed with him, and he and Neal would read Proust or "Dr. Sax" to each other, pleasantly arguing about Nietzsche or child rearing or even high school football.

But October 1952 was no clean, healing month in Jack's life, no season of purification and growth; he sank into his most ferocious despair yet, strangled on the bile of his impotent rage. Radiating hostility like a dark star, he was victim to his own genius: He had what Keats called "negative capacity"--the ability to hold opposing ideas simultaneously. That talent lent him an extraordinary capacity to empathize with even the cruelest perspectives on himself, and he understood Memere and Carl Solomon so well that he sometimes overlooked his own art and agreed with them. He regarded Goethe as his hero and he had faith in art, but his failure to publish was beginning to consume him. Neal, he had decided, was a philistine interested by

bills and not literature; when Cassady offered him some grass he had been growing, Jack morosely refused. They had an absurd argument about the price of pork chops that culminated in Jack's threat to buy a hot plate. Lost in the bitter satisfaction of his depression, Jack finally rejected all human company and fled to a San Francisco skid row hotel called the Cameo, where he lived while continuing to work as a student brakeman for the Southern Pacific.

The real source of Jack's cantankerousness was of course the publishing business, and in October he exercised his spite on Allen, his long suffering agent, in the ugliest letter Jack ever sent. Ginsberg was already quite vulnerable; the day before the letter arrived he had noted in his journal that he felt kin to the warped Caliban of the Tempest, that "quite a few people have given up on me and I have myself." Jack snarled and shrieked off the page that the failure of his career was purely the result of everyone's parasitic jealousy. He professed not to understand why even with its popular sex and drugs plot "On the Road" had failed to find a publisher, while Holmes' Go, which Jack reviled, had just earned a large paperback advance. Wallowing in the gratifying despair of martyrdom, he saw himself as an eternal victim, a Little Abner swindled by the city folks. Holmes had no talent, Allen's book of poems was mediocre, and "Road," though fantastic, would never be published. He told

Holmes at the same time that Allen had somehow betrayed himself to Carl Solomon big city sophistication, while Kerouac remained a peasant, steadfast to his Celtic superstition, allied only with the Indians. With all the rhetorical force he could muster, Jack closed his blast at Allen by telling him and everyone else to go away and leave him alone, slamming shut an imaginary door and stalking haughtily away. That he would--as Allen and he both knew--edge blushing back into the same figurative room a little while later made his torment no less real.

The vacuous horror of his mood was intensified by the fact that he did nothing but work as a student brakeman and put his earnings in the bank. At six hundred dollars a month, his railroad wages were the highest of his life, and he reacted by becoming a miser, fanatically saving every penny while he kept meticulous records of his expenses. He stole chicken wire from a junkyard rather than buy a piece for his hot plate, and waited patiently to find a replacement when he lost a single glove. Room rent at the Cameo Hotel was only $4.20 a week, and when he splurged he went to a charming bistro called the Public Restaurant, where three eggs cost twenty-six cents, and the atmosphere regaled him with the regular sight of crumbling winos who proved unable to keep down what was probably their first meal of the week. Kerouac was one of the lost now, among derelicts as wasted and useless as he felt himself to be. A year before he had

encountered a dead bum on the sidewalk, but only now did he think he could understand the awfulness of it. The Cameo was a creepy flophouse at 3rd and Howard Streets, a home for toothless old men, its curtains iron-stiff with dust, its sheets gray with the rubbing of too many scabrous old bodies. It was ordinarily quiet--the dying usually are--but Jack spent most of his time elsewhere, generally at work.

Life on the railroad was a vast exercise in nostalgia, every facet reminding Jack of the rails that had spread over inner Lowell like a spiderweb. His schedule was erratic, and the work call would come from the S.P. office about 4:30 A.M., forcing the Cameo's pot-bellied, white-haired desk clerk to slip up the stairs to rouse him. Breakfast consisted of raisin toast, eggs and coffee, along with another childhood favorite, lettuce and peanut butter. His "energy for sex changing to pain at the portals of work," he would shrug into jeans, workshirt, heavy shoes, fur collared jacket and baseball cap, pick up his lantern, keys, timetable, knife and handkerchief, and run for the station. Usually late, Jack needed every bit of his remaining football speed and moves to fly across the station floor and catch his train. Being a student brakeman was not overly difficult; mostly he set blocks of wood as brakes under the cars and served as flag man on the runs from San Francisco south into the coastal farm country around Watsonville and Monterey.

Writing about his experiences in a slightly drunken, excited barroom soliloquy of a piece he called "October in the Railroad Earth," Kerouac focused on the life at the side of the tracks--hobo encampments, the Pomo Indian section-hands, Braceros "working to pluck from the earth that which this America with its vast iron wages no longer thinks feasible as an activity yet eats, yet goes on eating," the urbane "commuters of America and steel civilization," and lovers wandering into the lush fields to have sex. His work day ended as the return train rumbled past the rose neon West Coast Bethlehem Steel sign in South San Francisco, near the meat packing lots where he faked boxcar numbers rather than descend to the rat infested mud flats to inspect the train properly. Off duty, Jack thought San Francisco was but "end of land sadness," and his only pleasures were a bottle of Tokay, his writing, and the free Fellaheen show of people in the skid row streets.[10]

He worked into November, but his spirits remained foul with frustration; he was a writer, not a brakeman, and hard labor galled him with its lack of social respect or purpose. Holmes caught the brunt of his spleen, at least in part because Jack had once accepted charity from the man he now regarded as his inferior. Before his paychecks began to come through in October, he had received fifty dollars from John Holmes. A friend of John's had lent Holmes a crucial fifty dollars early in the year, and when John re-

ceived an eight thousand dollar payment for Go's paperback rights in late September, he sent along fifty dollars and the story to Jack, in an effort to keep the good karma flowing. Jack wrote a gracious thank you in accepting the blessing, but smiling at irony was never his forte, and in private he succumbed to bitter, ugly envy.

Go was a basically accurate retelling of the gang's life around 1948, with Jack as "Gene Pasternak," Neal as "Harte Kennedy," Allen as "David Stofsky," and John as "Paul Hobbes." As Jack had suggested, the story focused on Neal's visit at New Year's 1948-49, and reached out to include Cannastra's death. Written without hope about "the lost children of the night," Go was stylistically more traditional than Jack's experimentations. More importantly, a tinge of square moralism sometimes impinged on Holmes' consideration of various exotic sexual and narcotic subjects, giving the book an occasional touch of unintentioned breathless sensationalism. It was the honest work of an intellectual trying to make sense of aliens, and Holmes succeeded as well as anyone not wholly of a scene could, especially in his scene of Allen's Blake vision. Two years before, Jack had told John that he liked almost all of the characters except himself, and that he thought it was a sincere and righteous work. At present he avoided saying anything to Holmes; besides, there was more.

A New York Sunday Times Magazine editor named Gilbert

Millstein had spotted the phrase "Beat Generation" in Go and asked Holmes for an article, which was published as "This is the Beat Generation." Like the novel, it was sound and intellectual. John wrote that "beat" was a "nakedness of mind, ultimately of soul," the "feeling of being reduced to the bedrock of consciousness." To be beat was to be obsessed with the need for faith in the world, with the need for values and a home place: "A man is beat when he wages the sum of his resources on a single number." Holmes mentioned Jack in connection with the term, and Jack wrote back thanking him politely, making gracious noises about the piece and its impact in San Francisco. At the very least, "This is the Beat Generation" struck a responsive nerve, and the magazine received an extraordinary four hundred letters about the piece, running them for three weeks after. A few people lost in America were interested in semi-criminal drop out sub-cults.

Always seasonal, work on the railroad dwindled away with winter and in early December Jack was laid off. Heading for Mexico, he invited Carolyn to join him; Neal stood on his equanamity and said "Yes," but thought "No." Marriage was of prime value to Carolyn, and so it was Neal who drove Jack to Mexico as part of a speedy dope run. Having partially rebounded from his gloom, Jack had already

made up with Allen, writing that Ginsberg had honored him by understanding his work. Gently, he pledged his affection for his younger brother, but warned him that his New York-style criticism was not meaningful for a spontaneous writer. Kerouac wanted to tap a pre-literate art.

Just as he and Neal arrived in Mexico, Bill departed for Florida and later Panama. Alone, Jack moved into a small adobe room on the roof of 212 Orizaba Street, a little cubicle open to the sun and moon and stars, the perfect location to attempt the novel he thought of as his last possibility for success. It didn't work; he had regained his normal pleasure in people after October's depths, and now he was so tremendously lonely that before Christmas he returned to New York, where Memere had resumed living. New Year's Eve he spent with Allen, at a party at Horace Mann classmate Jerry Newman's bop recording studio. It was a lousy party. Though he had admitted his need for company, Jack was still too devastated to communicate. As a result, he was, Allen noticed, "all hung up on noise, music, bands . . . artificial excitement," and unable to be a simple companion. As the first dawn of 1953 broke, Jack maudlinly lamented Memere's cruel fate, sobbing the tears of booze and pot in a cab on the way home, "older," Ginsberg thought, "and (no?) wiser." Allen was pudgy and a bore to him, Holmes seemed to be eating in expensive restaurants and hailing cabs; the only thing left for Jack to do was write another book.[11]

First called "Springtime Mary" and finally "Maggie Cassidy," the book was Jack's first telling of a love story in Proustian terms, as he put it, a mournful Memory Babe recounting of his romance with Mary Carney. It opened on New Year's Eve 1938, "before the war, before everyone knew the intentions of the world to America," when no one had any idea "that the world would turn mad." Hung down with his loneliness and the impossibility of his love for Carolyn Cassady, Jack loaded up on pot and goofballs, typed the first chapter, then wrote the rest by hand, "with just a touch of the Canuck-half Indian doubt and suspicion of all things non-Canuck non-half Indian." Though it was about the joys of the first love one never quite recovers from, "Maggie Cassidy" concluded that "love is bitter, death is sweet."

Death would at least be a release for his loathsome self, the guilty persona destined to be thrown "in a hole already eaten by the dogs of dolor like a sick Pope who's played with too many young girls." Though it was often beautiful and flowed nicely, the writing was only the surface of a melancholy sensation of lostness from the era when Americans walked and talked, communicated, rather than imprison themselves in automobiles and the "television seat of Time," the era when Jack himself was young and full of lovable potential. Loneliness slashed his mind with razors, and the support of his art paled at the desperation

of his need for love, or at least attention. Somehow, he was being beaten to death by the short end of the stick; Holmes made twenty thousand dollars for Go, and Jack was offered $250 for an option.

Madison Avenue's publishing world stirred up further bile in Jack. Ace Books had brought out Burroughs' Junkie in January, replete with a cover of a sleazily voluptuous blond being beaten as a syringe fell off the table at her side; there was no such scene in the book, of course. In late February Allen asked Jack for a blurb to go into David Dempsey's New York Times Book Review column, and Kerouac replied the next day with a petty, spiteful tantrum, whining that Bill was protected by the pseudonym "William Lee" and Holmes' blurb seemed to come from a disinterested observer. Indignant, he referred Allen to his new agent. Ginsberg replied, as he said, "most respectfully and in the spirit of strictest commerce," and dropped the subject for the moment. Jack was far nastier to Holmes, dismissing their relationship as a flimsy and meaningless New York connection between a "rich" man and a member of the laboring class. Furthermore, Jack sneered, his own suffering was real, but Holmes had to dig his out of Dostoyevsky. A suspicious fury had so engulfed Kerouac that he raised ugly questions about John's motives for sending him the fifty dollar present. It would be two years before Jack wrote another letter to Holmes, though in April

he contributed a blurb for Junkie to Allen: "A learned, vicious Goering-like uninhibited sophisticate makes the first intelligent modern confession on drugs . . . stands classic and alone."

Trapped in the corners of the claustrophobic little apartment the Kerouacs occupied in Richmond Hill, Jack was emasculated at not being able to support Memere, and toyed with the idea of working on the Canadian railroad. That soap bubble popped quickly, and in mid-April 1953 he returned to the Southern Pacific, working out of San Luis Obispo, about 250 miles south of San Francisco. Bored and miserable, he worried that his mind was being sucked down into the narrowing center of a whirlpool, and his only comfort was a vague but developing fantasy of going into the wilderness that summer to learn, Thoreau-like, how to survive independently on the land as a true Fellaheen. He tried to break the drowning sensation by leaving the railroad, and after a ghastly San Francisco drunk with Al Sublette he shipped out on the S.S. William Carruth in early June, bound through the Panama Canal for New Orleans.

Liquor drowned the "loneliness Angel" on his shoulder, produced what he called a "sparkle glow" in his belly, "turning the world from a place of ash serious absorption in the details of struggle and complaint, into a gigantic gut joy." Flavored with Tokay, the world was too sweet in fact, and he drank so much on the Carruth that he became

frightened at his inability to hold a job. Having talked himself into a job as officer's waiter, Jack fell nervously silent, dispensing only a slight superior smile; what he admitted was his "inability to be gracious and in fact human and like an ordinary guy" infuriated his shipmates and officers, and when the Carruth docked in New Orleans in July 1953, he quit the ship and returned to New York.[12]

Sad, terrified times they were, and from the mighty to the ephemeral almost nothing appealed to Jack. "Victory at Sea," the cold war epic retelling of the naval battles of World War II, had been the winter's television hit, but Kerouac was disgusted with the technical colossus it celebrated, unmixed with any sensitivity to human suffering. Little about the era enriched him; "I Believe" was the hit song of 1953, and though the thought was sentimentally attractive, its turgid lyrics and weary melody made it anathema to him. Just after he hit New York the war in Korea ended, but his mild relief was washed away by the horror of so many uselessly dead. A month before, the American government had executed Julius and Ethel Rosenberg at Sing Sing. Allen had telegraphed President Eisenhower that the "Rosenbergs are pathetic Government Will sordid execution obscene America caught in crucifixion machine only barbarians want them burned I say stop it before we fill our souls with death house horror." Tender

prophecy did not suit the times; 1953 was synonomous with the rat-vicious barbarism embodied by G. David Schine and Roy Cohn, then rampaging through USIA libraries putting the torch to books.

Jack's only desire was to be published, and at long last he had a bit of hope; in March he had lunch with Malcolm Cowley, the well known Viking Press editorial advisor. In July Cowley wrote to Allen, whom Jack had just given full power of attorney for his writing. "You are right in thinking that I am interested in Kerouac and his work," Cowley said. "He seems to me the most interesting writer who is not being published today." Cowley thought that "On the Road" stood a good chance of immediate publication, although "Visions of Cody" and "Sax" were much too experimental for regular publishers. But everything took time. The post office misplaced one manuscript, Jack was too timid with both Allen and the publishers, and the months slipped by and nothing happened.[13]

Except that Jack fell in love.

Her name was Ailene Lee and she was half American Indian and half black, a strikingly beautiful woman whose rich mahogany skin was stretched over high, elegant cheekbones, her black eyes glittering out at Jack with an energy he had never before seen in a woman. It was her voice that was unique, a hoarsely amazing blend of Bloomingdale's class, black street hip, and Village-Columbia intellec-

tualism that left him enthralled. She was perched on a car fender with Lucien in front of the San Remo Bar when Jack saw her, and that evening he approached her, in good Village fashion, with the line, "What are you reading?" Their coming together was mildly odd; Jack was by no means a "subterranean," as Allen called the Villagers. The bohemians who clustered at the San Remo, Jack thought, were "hip without being slick . . . intelligent without being corny . . . intellectual as hell and know all about Pound without big pretensions . . . they are very christlike." Jack was not cool but hot, a "big paranoic bum of ships and railroads" as he described himself, dressed in an uncouth Hawaiian shirt half unbuttoned a la Harry Belafonte, not at all the "thin ascetic strange intellectual" that Jack thought Ailene would want.

After a week in Richmond Hill revelling in fantasies of her, Kerouac arranged with Allen for the three of them to meet at Allen's place on 206 E. 7th St. before going to see Charley Parker at Birdland. At midnight Allen gracefully disappeared and Jack and Ailene returned to her apartment on Paradise Alley, in the deepest reaches of the lower East Side of Manhattan. Surrounded by the air well babble of Puerto Rican mamacitas calling down to their children as the radio roared about "Che-puh Cerveza" (Schaefer Beer), they danced in the dark, and made love, and in the morning Jack ran away back to Richmond Hill's order and peace and quiet.

It was only a few days later, when Jack spent a night

at Allen's and Ailene came in unexpectedly to borrow bus fare, that they talked deeply for the first time, bared their souls and told their life stories. Ailene's husky hip voice was like the dancing blur of a sorceror's wand, weaving a tale of madness and painful despair that so resembled in spirit Jack's own life that it must have been almost deja-vu to listen to her. Ailene had been living with various cool hipsters--which meant she was living alone--and had flipped out. Jack thought they'd treated her badly. "Yeah well they never treat anyone--" she muttered, eyes lost and far-away, "like they never do anything--you take care of yourself, I'll take care of me." Jack spat out the word "Existentialism" in sarcastic agreement and she nodded and added, "But American worse cool existentialism of junkies man."

Snuggled against Jack in a chair at Allen's, she whispered of losing her sense of self entirely, of walking naked out into the Village night propelled by some deeply felt and uncontrollable symbolic necessity that made her crouch catlike in the mist on a back-alley wood fence, utterly paralyzed of will, until at last she passed through some private apocalypse and came down off the fence to borrow some clothes and some money and go "buy this brooch I'd seen that afternoon at some place with old seawood in the window, in the Village . . . it was the first symbol I was going to allow myself." When she confessed her paranoia about someone injecting her, Jack recalled a similar hallucination of his

own eight years before while eating Benzedrine with Vicki Russell, and listened intently as Ailene described an early morning encounter with a man in a wheelchair. "A great electrical current of real understanding passed between us and I could feel the other levels, the infinite number of them of every intonation in his speech," she blurted out. Gulping air she continued, "I'd never realized before how much is happening all the time." As her story unwound to include a stay at Bellevue Hospital at the end of that day, Jack sat overwhelmed by the first spontaneous soulful talk he'd heard in years; this black-Indian woman was a true American, another sufferer like Neal, and she bedazzled him.

They made love and that night went to a friend's apartment. Jack was a drunken boor, freeloading booze, looking at homosexual pornography and listening to Marlene Dietrich until three in the morning, oblivious to Ailene's desire to go home. But at least he relented. To him, she was "so hip, so cool, so beautiful, so modern, so new," and one part of Jack's ego swelled as they cruised along the Village streets on their way to the Five Spot Cafe for music, the San Remo for drinks, or Allen's apartment for a party. Yet she was too hip, too cool, and it made him nervous and thus drunken and a boor. He wanted to get her away from the city to Mexico, or perhaps a hut in the woods, but Ailene had no "eyes for that hysterical poverty deal." Too, he distrusted her "city decadent intellectual dead-

ended in cause-and-effect analyses and solutions" mentality, her sloppiness and intensity, her closeness to his soul, her blackness. The first time they'd gone to bed, he later told her, "I thought I saw some kind of black thing I've never seen before, hanging [from her body], like it scared me."

Ultimately, their real enemy was Gabrielle Ange Kerouac, whom Jack described as "sweetly but nonetheless really tyrannical." Memere's saccharine bigotry was oppressive, but she really needed him, and Ailene did not. His rarified and extended consciousness was a superb recording instrument, but its focus was too tight to allow for any action but the pushing of a pen. A camera eye was his joy and curse, and even rushing orgasms never displaced it; he could feel but never give wholly, could never achieve one-ness with a lover. Puritanically perverse, Jack made a slight fetish of black panties and demon lust, but even his fantasy world only revealed the eternal virgin-whore guilts that strangled him. Though garter belts and black stockings were a thrill, they were no foundation for a balanced love.[14]

Jack and Ailene's relationship spun and yanked like a set of works with an unbalanced center wheel, and then Gregory Corso appeared and Jack's jealousy cooked their romance to a dry crisp. Twenty-two at the time, Corso was a strange young poet, "a refinement of beauty out of a destructive atmosphere," as Allen would say of his work,

a prophet of the gutters. After giving birth to Gregory on Greenwich Village's Bleecker Street in 1930, Corso's mother deserted him and returned to Italy while he was an infant, leaving him to be raised first in an orphanage and then by several sets of foster parents who seemed to him a "parental hydra, as it were." Teacher nuns pulled his ears and frightened him; sent to live with his father at the age of eleven, he fled and was confined three months for observation at Bellevue Psychiatric Hospital, later for five months in the Tombs. At age sixteen his bedroom was the subway--he took the A train, since it had the longest run--and at seventeen he was caught in a mad scheme to heist a Household Finance office and was sent to Clinton State Prison. An old con there gave him, as he later told the story, copies of The Brothers Karamazov, The Red and the Black, and Les Miserables, and by his 1950 release, Shelley and his own poetry were the meaningful center of Corso's life. Enthusiastic as always, Corso was sitting one night in the Pony Stable Bar, pounding on a table as he shouted that "I'm a great poet." Allen had walked in a moment before, heard the commotion, "So of course, I knew at once he was a great poet."

A cheerfully excited time later, Gregory offered to share his greatest treasure with Allen, the voyeuristic gem of a certain young woman who danced nude before her window every night. Ginsberg was agreeable, and they went to see

the show. "Why, I know her!" laughed Allen, and he took Gregory up to meet his old girlfriend, instantly sealing their budding friendship. Somehow, Gregory and Jack were never in town together, and their first meeting was in connection with Ailene Lee.

Even before Gregory's arrival on the scene, Jack and Ailene's relationship was deteriorating. Jack was usually drunk and frequently late, so consumed by his own fears that he could not recognize Ailene's own insecurities. He found her "little girl-like fear so cute, so edible." Self-conscious and mumbling, their talk wasn't exciting any more. Once he'd plotted to get rid of Ailene, but Gregory's presence made Jack realize how much he wanted her. She and Gregory seemed so young to Jack, and sitting in the Five Spot listening to Thelonious Monk and Art Blakey, he was remote, heartsick to think that he'd failed once again, that he was a sinner banned from happiness.

When Allen threw a party honoring John Holmes, Jack fell apart trying to cope with his twin jealousies, ran away and got sickeningly drunk with Lucien. Crying with the pain of loss, Jack saw a picture at the bottom of his glass, an image of Memere's grasping-but-nurturing love for him, his sole support in the muddle of a stupid-drunkard-self-hating life. Later he tried to work things out with Ailene, but when she told him that she'd slept with Greogry--Corso said "she raped me"--it was all over.[15]

Yet Jack had a second outlet in his writing, though it was as debilitating as Memere. He doubted his act even as he performed it, interjecting that "a Baudelaire's poem is not worth his grief," but he seized his art like a crucifix against the vampire of sorrow. Swallowing some Benzedrine, he sat down at a typewriter with a teletype roll and in "three full moon nights" wrote his confession of the affair, a story he called "The Subterraneans."

Modeled after Dostoyevsky's Notes from the Underground, "The Subterraneans" was a sacramental revelation, its language coiling out like thick and twisted ropes of sperm, interpolating his conscious memories and unconscious feelings with a wonderful replication of Ailene's syntax and diction, her private sound. As she later said, Jack wrote non-intellectually, like a "Cunt," a physical organ for which "excitement and impact are more important than the writing itself . . . he could only live by being stimulated." Recording his tragedy did not relieve the pain, it only justified it, "redeemed" it, and for such high purpose he told his tale in full-blown honesty, admitting--as few men in 1953 would--that he feared her vagina as a vice, that he was afraid. "The Subterraneans" ended with fateful words that caught the essence of his life, recording the artistic consciousness that left him one step removed from the present reality: "And I go home, having lost her love, and write this book."[16]

Pale and shaken--he'd lost some fifteen pounds in three days of writing--Jack got on the subway and went to Allen's apartment for the on-going party created by Bill Burroughs' visit en route to Africa. They enjoyed a pleasant and creative reunion. Allen had a job, an apartment, and enough money to play host, and with nine years of intimacy already among them, they gossiped and became reacquainted with the present, and the past. The fact that Bill was in love with Allen sharpened the atmosphere, and Jack was, Allen thought, "astounded, horrified, and pruriently interested" in this new twist in their lives. Allen had just completed a fine poem about Neal entitled "The Green Automobile," Jack was at his peak, and Bill was expanding his talents with what he called "routines," word-sketches about an imagined place called "Interzone."

Bill and Allen were also editing together a book of their recent correspondence, to be called "The Yage Letters." Burroughs had left Mexico in search of the psychedelic plant Yage in an odyssey more bizarre than Homer ever knew. His astringent pen recorded encounters with Circean "whores and pimps and hustlers" in Panama, and the Scylla and Charybdis of the Canal Zone Civil Service. "He does not have a receiving set," thought Bill of one specimen, "and he gives out

like a dead battery. There must be a special low frequency Civil Service brain wave." To Burroughs, policemen looked like "the end result of atomic radiation," but he saved his most exquisite loathing for one priest, who "sat there in his black uniform nakedly revealed as the advocate of death. A business man without the motivation of avarice, cancerous." He was conned by a jungle medicine man and proved vulnerable to the blandishments of local boy hustlers. "Trouble is," as Bill said of himself, "I share with the late Father Flanigan--he of Boy's Town--the deep conviction that there is no such thing as a bad boy." Bill had finally located the new drug through a friendly German in a most unremarkable shop, and piles of it littered Allen's apartment.

Deeply impressed by "The Subterraneans," Bill and Allen asked Jack to write up a checklist of how he wrote spontaneously, which he called "The Essentials of Spontaneous Prose." Bill's visit gave them an enormous number of new things to consider, and their conversations encompassed nostalgic war-time memories, the Mayan and Egyptian art they saw at the Metropolitan Museum, their writing, and their generation in America.[17]

As November passed, things got a little out of hand. In some horrific replay of his time in the jungle, Bill kept insisting that he and Allen "were ultimately going to schlup together, sort of shlup and absorb each other, a kind of monstrous junkie-organic-protoplasmic schlup of two

beings." Jack was not an entirely disinterested observer of their sexual plight. Late in November, he commenced to write a letter to Bill and Allen, both of whom were about to leave New York for the visible future. Junked out on dolophines, his brain roiled with wine and goofballs, he figuratively staggered to a podium to bestow his after-dinner blessings on his departing friends, to smoke a fine cigar and express his love for them. Too befuddled to deliver his post-banquet enconium, Jack instead slid into a tirade against homosexual writers, deprecating the work of Paul Bowles, Carson McCullers, and especially Gore Vidal.

Three years younger than Jack and the author of four published novels, Vidal was a ripe symbol of literary business success, an elegant, critically acclaimed writer gracefully at home in a world that spit out Jack like an unwanted seed. One night in the San Remo Bar with Burroughs, Jack recognized Vidal and gushingly brought him over to introduce Bill, giddily trying to create an historic meeting of authors. The night wore on to the sound of clinking glasses. Drunk, Jack began to flatter Vidal grotesquely, fawning over him. "Boastfully queerlike," as Allen said, Jack grabbed Vidal's hand and offered himself for the night; they went to Gore's room at the Chelsea Hotel and Jack proved impotent, slipping away to sleep in the bathtub. His failed, flaccid penis was a close approximation of his personal--though not his creative--life that fall. Failure on every plane had de-

voured all his patience, and his inner reserves were almost gone. He needed something further in his life to give him a measure of solace, mental armor that could defend him from frustration and booze and Memere and the rest of his tattered life.

"Necessity is the mother," Duke Ellington said, and flat on his back, Jack reached out and found the beginning of what he needed in a book.[18]

CHAPTER X

THE DHARMA ROAD

A heavy wind of change blew through the lives of the remaining New York members of the circle, scattering them down new roads, both on earth and in the soul. In July 1953, Allen and John Holmes had thrown the Chinese coins of prophecy called the "I Ching" as they pondered leaving the city. Both interpreted their answers as "Yes," and Holmes left New York to renovate a house and settle in Old Saybrook, Connecticut. After all his years of dull Manhattan grief, Allen was also ready to leave New York and accept Neal and Carolyn's invitations to join them. In celebration of his long-delayed release, Allen planned no simple bus trip but a vast pilgrimage to delights that would nurture his city-stunted soul. There would be stops to see Florida, Havana, Yucatan and its Mayan ruins--"as Byron saw ruins of Athens and Rome," Allen put it--and the rest of Mexico, so that when he saw Neal "I'll be able to talk for hours about not only NYC intellectual beauties but also manly savage solitude of jungles." Neal had a parking lot waiting for Allen, with Jack to hold it down until he arrived. Jack planned to work the Penn Station baggage room through Christmas and leave for San Francisco on the 26th, arriving in time to celebrate New Year's Eve 1953 with the Cassadys. When Allen set off on December 19th, Jack collapsed.

His guilts had flayed him raw, and his dreams tortured him with films of a Leo he knew was dead endlessly returning to Lowell in search of a job. Struggling awake, Jack would be certain that he was Leo, that they shared the same dying soul. Riven by his ashen sadness, he felt only guilt for the way he treated Memere, for being a "sheepish . . . idiot turning out rejectable unpublishable wildprose madhouse enormities." A madman clown to the publishers who lived by the code of business lunches and legal contracts, Jack sobbed that his devoutly honest prophecy was being debauched. At Christmas he wrote Neal and Carolyn that he'd be on his way as soon as his paycheck came through in early January, hitching through the south to buy marijuana in Mexico. Yet his weary disgust kept him in Richmond Hill until another pleading-encouraging message from San Jose put him on a bus that arrived in California early in February.[1]

But in the middle of the muckheap of his life there was a jewel--a radiant diamond--and it was called Buddhism. Over the coming months Jack would pluck it out and polish it and make it the center of his life. Distraught over Ailene, he had sought refuge in the stony truth of Thoreau's Walden. Thoreau's rejection of "civilization" made him another Fellaheen to Jack, who accepted Thoreau as a true prophet; more, he kept making tantalizing references to Eastern philosophies. Shortly before Jack left for California, he went to the library and checked out Ashvagosha's biography, The Life of the Buddha.

One phrase--"Repose Beyond Fate"--leaped off the page and seized his imagination.

Suddenly, Buddhism promised peace, freedom from Memere and Madison Avenue's vagaries, and Jack began to meditate. At his first attempt to seek Buddha, he closed his eyes "and saw golden swarms of nothing, the true thing, the thusness of creation." Searching further, he came upon the four noble truths of Gautama Buddha: The four rules made sense to him as the Christian ten never had, resonating in his soul the way Bird, Diz and Monk could fuse a perfect harmony in his ears. The first truth was incredibly simple, yet defined Jack's life as he saw it. "All Existence is suffering." The second truth said that "The cause of suffering is desire and ignorance." Third, "There is a possible end of suffering." Last, "This end may be achieved by the eight-fold path." The eight-fold way demanded right knowledge, aspiration, speech, conduct, means of livelihood, endeavor, mindfulness, and meditation.

Some aspects of this new practice resembled his old Catholicism; there were five commandments, which banned killing, theft, adultery, lying and drinking alcohol. All but the last harmonized with Jack's natural impulses. Over the next year he practiced chastity and--brother of Gerard that he was--focused on developing compassion towards all life. He learned the Gatha of Impermanence, that "All composite things are impermanent, / they are subject to

birth and death; / Put an end to birth and death, / And there is a blissful tranquility."

And as far as a lone student could, he tried to

> Pursue not the other entanglements,
> Dwell not in the inner void.
> Be serene in the oneness of things,
> And [dualism] vanishes by itself.

Buddhism was symbolized by a wheel which depicted the various gati, the realms of existence. A blind woman represented ignorance, a house the senses; desire showed in a drunkard, and life was captured in a man carrying a corpse. Classic Mahayana Buddhism denoted a world of Gods, men, demons, asuras, animals and Pretas (Ghosts), and its complex mythology had an easy affinity for a child of saints, martyrs, and popes. Jack's Buddhism was fervent, pious, and religious, full of the "hearts and flowers sentimentality" of his Catholic childhood. Zen monk Philip Whalen, later a close friend of Jack's, thought that he was sensitive to the "imaginative part, the spaces and times and giganticism" of Buddhism, but his "Edgar Guest sensibilities" bound him close to the religious sentimentality of St. Teresa de Lisieux, the bourgeois saint.

No one could doubt his sincerity, his devotion, or his courage. Americans--Memere and Nin as prime examples--knew as little of the Way as they did of the far side of the moon; in the decade before Jack discovered Buddhism, there had been

only eleven articles on the subject in all of the nation's general magazines. In them, Buddhism was either exotically cute, as in a House and Garden story on temple gardens, or faintly ludicrous, as in Life's coverage of a Brooklyn man who had assumed the robes of a monk in Ceylon. Allen had discovered the beauty of Chinese paintings a year before at the New York Public Library, and had pursued his new interest at the Metropolitan Museum and Columbia. But his was an intellectual interest; Jack had no intellectual interests, only passions, and at the time he ignored the abstract pleasure of Asian art.[2]

Now shuddering with the ecstasy of a true believer, Jack arrived in San Jose convinced that he had found the solution to living in the modern world and anxious to proselytize Neal and Carolyn. Incredibly, Neal beat him to the punch: He had found a prophet, Edgar Cayce, and was ready, with all of his fabled energy and charm, to convert Jack! Some months before, Neal had come upon a copy of Gina Cerminara's Many Mansions in the backseat of an automobile he was parking. He began the book idly, then excited by an intuitive sureness he'd never before experienced, he zipped through the book, carefully replaced it, and pell-mell rushed off to buy his own copy. Many Mansions was the saga of Edgar Cayce, a mystic American healer who identified people's past lives by entering into a trance, and his preachings were an extended version of Christianity which incorporated a belief

in reincarnation, clairavoyance, Atlantis, and especially karma.

Confronted with this new doctrine, Jack retreated to the San Jose Public Library and read deeply of Buddhism, primarily in Dwight Goddard's Buddhist Bible and particularly in the classic Diamond Sutra. The Sutra, a dialogue between Buddha and his disciple Subhuti, was an interminable cycle of negation that spun wisdom into Jack's mind, repeating over and over that life meant suffering because humans failed to recognize that it was illusory: Recognize the illusion and the suffering pilgrim would escape the cycle of birth and death and enter the infinite and unchanging void. As the Buddha poetically concluded,

> All composite things
> Are like a dream, a phantasm, a bubble
> and a shadow,
> Are like a dew-drop and a flash of
> lightning;
> They are thus to be regarded.

At the Cassady's kitchen table Jack read the Buddha to Neal and Carolyn in the urgent voice of the possessed, but their faith in Cayce was unshaken.

"But a soul, man, you are a soul; the soul is you, individual, special," Neal would preach. "The You you've been building from dozens of lives . . . makin' it and blowin' it, see?" Matching Jack's beatific certainty with a glittering self-confidence, Neal summed up, "What you sow, so shall you reap."

Jack shrugged in frustration, grimaced; "Pah! All life is suffering and pain . . . the cause is desire. The world is all illusion . . . nothin' means nothin' . . . period!"

As Neal pressed his argument, Jack would be too frustrated to do anything but bellow "WORDS!", and their arguments took on the contemptuous edge of mutual fanaticism. Later Jack would understand that "The sound of silence is all the instruction you'll get," but while he lived with Neal and Carolyn he continued to try and convert them. In a mellow moment, Jack conceded that it was all a superficial difference in choices, a matter of cosmic style. Often, his imagination was more acidulous; Neal had taken to preaching Cayce to the Italians and bohemians of San Francisco's North Beach district, and Jack likened him to Billy Graham. Neal's master Cayce struck Jack as a cross between Jesus of Nazareth and a redneck mountain hick. The Cassadys thought Jack used Buddhism as a nihilistic evasion--"nothin' means nothin'"--and Jack retorted that Neal was a typical egotistical American, proud of his suffering and unwilling to accept the democratic reality of the First Truth of Buddha. On that point, Carolyn agreed. Neal wanted a powerful God to stop him from committing his "sins," and Caycean karmic retribution fulfilled this need. Jack thought it was all a Christian-authoritarian dualistic fraud; he lectured Carolyn that Jesus should have gone to Asia where Buddha would have saved him from his messiah complex, emphasizing to Carolyn that Buddha

was no God, but the enlightened one, a state available to all.[3]

In March their mutual certainties and Jack's gloomy poverty made them irritate each other. They quarreled over who would pay for some porkchops, and Jack moved back to the grimy comfort of the Cameo Hotel. Gazing softly out his window at the winos, whores, and police cars, he wrote little lotus bubble sketch poems he called the "San Francisco Blues." In between his writing, he debated whether or not to find Allen in Mexico, or sit under a tree and meditate, or perhaps visit Mexico with Al Sublette. But Sublette was too much a devotee of wine and the ladies, and Jack wanted a chastely soulful expedition. It was a cruel irony that as Buddhism estranged him from his old friends it was almost as painful as the private agonies meditation had begun to heal.

Allen's journey had indeed been astounding, but Jack recognized it as essentially private, and chose not to interfere. Allen hadn't been impressed with Florida and Cuba, but found the Mexican jungle Clark Gable, the Arabian Nights, and Tarzan all in one, a fantasyland of adventure that exceeded his wildest dreams. He settled briefly at an archeological dig near Chichen Itza, wandering among giant Mayan ruins which he described as "stone cocks a thousand years old grown over with moss." Then he visited the forests of Quintana Roo and plantations that housed exiles taken straight from the pages of The Treasure of Sierra Madre. Karen Shields, an American woman whose family owned the Palenque archeological site, in-

vited him to stay at her cocoa finca for a week or two and it stretched into months. Using the farm as a base camp, he explored the back country scene of an earthquake. The local people were impressed with the intent young man from East 7th St., and permitted him to see their sacred cave, which they called "Acavalna" (House of Night); Allen was equally struck by their voodooesque primitive Christian church, with its drums and "long sinister pagan candles." Prowling about the jungle, Allen grew outwardly more attractive with a dapper beard, and bloomed spiritually as well; he emerged from Mexico with his radiantly fearless new poem "Siesta in Xbalba."

Broke and bored with the Cameo Hotel, Jack drifted back to New York in April, just missing Allen's triumphant procession into California. Yet he felt a glowing affection for Allen, if only because his younger brother had enjoined him to teach about Buddhism. Jack's nervous beginner's grasp made him pompous--he demanded that Allen give him the same concentration that he would give Einstein as he lectured on relativity. Jack confined his first lesson to a booklist that excluded the Bhagavad Gita as too worldly and included Goddard, Asvagosha, The Gospel of Buddha by Paul Carus, Buddhist Legends by E. W. Burlingame, and Buddhism in Translation by Henry Clarke Warren, among others. Having typed up his San Jose Library research as a volume he called "Some of the Dharma" (it would turn into a lifetime project), he offered to send it on request, though he warned that some

of it was mistaken or written while high. His poem "How to Meditate" was in the same vein: "--lights out-- / fall, hands clasped into instantaneous / ecstasy like a shot of heroin," for the goal was "deadstop trance."

The tone of Jack's letters to Allen was one of dreamy calm and patronizing, mysterious certainty. Having reached the nothingness center of tranquility within, Jack murmured like a character out of Shangri-la: He need suffer no more. It was unfortunate that life was not so simple. Jack needed a Thoreauvian hut, but instead had a querulous mother, a crowded flat in Richmond Hill, and a literary career that still inflamed him with desire. Though he wanted to abandon the licentious outward manifestations of life for the essence of mind recognition, on Saturday night he still hopped the subway for boozy communion with the subterraneans of the San Remo. He had a brief, warped fling with a woman who happened to be an addict, but heroin and alcohol produced different personalities, and the affair soon proved much too emotionally draining for him.

As a consequence, Jack swore that it was too late for him to love, though he still wanted to badly. Ailene Lee was around for a while; although they held hands and he vowed that he loved her, nothing came of their brief moment of renewed romance. There was another fight with Holmes--Jack became enraged when John was forty-five minutes late for a concert, and didn't speak to him for nearly a year.

Henry Cru was fat and boring, and in all New York, Jack could tolerate only Jerry Newman, then setting up the Esoteric Record Company, and Lucien, his eternal drinking partner. Memere was so disgusted with his paganism that he became convinced she was going to throw him out, and he planned to live as a pilgrim across the river from El Paso, eating bean stews and reading the Buddhist Bible.

As always, his writing was the real issue. Seymour Lawrence at Little-Brown had just rejected "On the Road," which Jack had briefly retitled "The Beat Generation" after the publicity generated by John Holmes' New York Times article. Lawrence justified his rejection with the usual complaints about lack of craftsmanship. Mark Van Doren, for whom Jack had such deep respect, had dismissed "Dr. Sax" as "monotonous and probably without meaning in the end." Jack had manuscripts out all over New York, and all they did was gather dust. He continued to write only because it seemed wasteful not to use his experience. Plagued with ugly dreams, he slept wretchedly.[4]

In that he was not alone; the entire country was trapped in a living nightmare.

From late April through June, 1954, Jack and the rest of the nation sat transfixed before the TV and watched a blue-white flickering duel for power between Senator Joseph McCarthy

and the United States Army. McCarthy would lose, but the results were not simple. Later, most American intellectuals remembered Army counsel Joseph Welch's brahmin tones and blamed McCarthyism on the seedy masses, pontificating that it was a traditional midwestern populism out to devour the symbols of the cosmopolitan East. The historians were quite wrong; the frightening effects of McCarthy's totalitarianism had made them accept the elitist fear of the masses that had created McCarthyism in the first place. Despite his personal genius for creating disorder, McCarthy came to power as a product of the power lust of the Republican right wing, the canny Neanderthalism of the Southern Democrats, and what one historian called "The Fear of Honorable Men" in the rest of America's leaders.

In 1952 America chose Eisenhower, not Taft; they may have been uncomfortable with Stevenson the "egghead," but there was no evidence that McCarthy ever significantly influenced their votes. To confuse the matter, McCarthy was a foreign policy liberal, having backed the Marshall Plan, NATO, and the Truman Doctrine. At the same time, he so terrified such famous Senate progressives as Hubert Humphrey that, like rabid rabbits, they tried to outdo him with neo-fascist bills like the "Communist Control Act." McCarthy had an extraordinary talent for manipulating the Senate and the mass media, but he remained in power because he helped Republican conservatives. His Senatorial collapse was due to his lack of manners, as much as anything else. In the

public opinion polls he lost because he had become a bore; after twenty-five years of depression, World War II, cold war, the Korean War, and now "peace," it was time for Americans to reap the benefits of a consumerized culture that spewed out bourbon flavored toothpaste and 1954's biggest innovation, TV dinners. In the depression Jack had shopped at the Bon Marche downtown and played sandlot ball, but in this new decade suburbia had mushroomed with shopping centers and Little League, an homogenized conformity light years away from the roughhewn eccentricities of old Lowell.

Although few noticed, two epochal events took place in May: The French outpost at Dien Bien Phu fell to Ho Chi Minh's Viet Minh, and the Supreme Court announced that segregation was "inherently unequal" in Brown vs. The Board of Education of Topeka. As Americans ate their TV dinners, their collective goals were clear; babies for women, well-paying careers for men, "adjustment" rather than individualism for all. Ike the non-ideological conservative, as "naked of ideas as a new-born babe" said I.F. Stone, maintained the New Deal consensus by ignoring his right wing and supporting laws for highway development, school support, urban renewal and medical insurance.

Buried under the peace and contentment were some ugly pictures. In April Life published for two weeks running the first color photographs of the hydrogen bomb blast that had caused Elugelab Island in the Pacific to vanish. The

crucified victims of the anticommunist witch hunts, their emotional stigmata yet oozing, discovered that they were still blacklisted. Several hundred communists had been deported as aliens, after an average residency in the U.S. of forty-five years. One exile was Charlie Chaplin. Chaplin may already have been past his artistic prime, but his departure was indicative of the sorry state of the nation's arts. In 1954 Americans loved two kinds of books. They purchased religious material like the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, Norman Vincent Peale's Power of Positive Thinking, and The Prayers of Peter Marshall. They also wallowed in the bloody adventures of Joseph McCarthy's fictional counterpart, Mickey Spillane's "Mike Hammer."

Brutalized by Buchenwald, Hiroshima, and Korea's Pork Chop Hill, half convinced that the cold war ugliness would never end, Americans readily embraced Spillane's violent, anticommunist super hero, and in the process made him the best-selling author in American history. Dick Tracy had been created on the same model, but the depression-era Chester Gould never dreamed of a man who could say, as Mike Hammer did: "I snapped the side of the rod across his jaw and laid the flesh to the bone . . .[a scream] cut off in the middle as I pounded his teeth back into his mouth with the end of the barrel . . . For laughs I gave him a taste of his own sap on the back of his hand and felt the bones go into splinters." Spillane's New York was filled with vermin, and Hammer, friend

of blind newsies and the little guy, would set it free from the invading rats. Hammer was no simple detective but in essence the old evangelical figure of "Jehovah's flaming sword," part of a tradition close to the rhetoric of Secretary of State John Foster Dulles. Jack thought Spillane was a moron.

The "defense of freedom" that Mike Hammer's crusade represented was not limited to the popular culture; uptown intellectuals had their own methods as well. Early in the 1950s American writers and critics like Arthur Koestler, Sidney Hook, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., James T. Farrel, and Diana Trilling had founded the American Committee for Cultural Freedom. It was part of the world-wide Congress of Cultural Freedom, whose house organ was the journal Encounter, which was edited by men as reknowned as Irving Kristol and Stephen Spender. The magazine projected a tone of brilliant sophistication and learning in the inarguably virtous name of defending free inquiry: It was also a CIA front, its editor Melvin Lasky a CIA agent and CCF Director Michael Josselman another.

Reading Encounter, the U.S. intellectual elite absorbed a basic CIA perspective. It began with a ferocious anticommunism that attacked even subtle challenges to government policy as dilatory and just short of treason, defined "freedom" as the defense of the U.S. and Western Europe from the Soviet Union, and canonized the federal government as the ul-

timate arbiter of all significant debate. The sort of people who read and contributed to Encounter were servants to the bureaucratic power that funded their magazine; so long as they accepted the status quo, they were "free" to run their little show without overt interference. Invisible chains are easy to ignore and deny, and nearly impossible to break. And so Encounter attacked Soviet horrors but ignored American ones; it said a great deal about Hungary and nothing about Guatemala, and labelled the Emergency Civil Liberties Committee--consisting of Corliss Lamont, Albert Einstein, and I.F. Stone among others--as a communist front.[5]

Jack was fascinated with the theatrical qualities of Joseph McCarthy's TV program--"Point of Order, Mr. Chairman, Point of Order," Roy Cohn's debauched lizard eyes, the Beacon Hill folksiness of Joseph Welch--and came away from his television split by several different reactions. Jack kept yelling at Lucien that "McCarthy's got the real dope on the Jews and fairies," and about that time he began to denounce Jews, fairies, and commies himself. As Jews and homosexuals were emblematic of the publishing world to Jack, his rhetorical attacks were simply a new and more ugly side to an old frustration. Ignorant of national affairs and fiercely anti-authoritarian, Jack discovered that politics was an area where he could easily propitiate his parental guilts by adopting Leo's traditional Roman Catholic anticommunism. When Neal's friend Al Hinckle became enamored with radical politics, Jack

castigated him as a fool who represented not sturdy American dissent but treason. Yet his nightmares kept bothering him, and around that time Jack dreamt of a mass prison break-out in the Mississippi River Valley, the heart of the nation. As he transcribed his night visions, he added, "I feel sickened by the cowardice and hysteria of America become so blind as to misrecognize the freedom needs of imprisoned men 'Communists' or not."

He revealed his deepest feelings about his time in a story he wrote during the hearings called "cityCityCITY." A science fiction tale that owed much to Alduous Huxley and William Burroughs, "City" was set on a future earth totally covered by steel plates and apartments several miles deep. All babies were born at Central Deactivator, where a Deactivator disk was riveted in their breast bone, permanently linking them to the Computer of Infinite Merit, which controlled everything on Earth from Master Center Love. Women controlled the computer, but were generous with their inferiors, men and children. All citizens had access to a TV called a "Brow Vision Set," a rubber disk on the forehead that produced total sensation. There was also 17-JX, a delightful soma-like drug.

Two things disturbed the somnambulistic if ant-like serenity of the City; the extraordinary population pressure required the occasional extinction by mass electrocution of those blocks whose deportment grades and 17-JX consumption were lowest. And there were subversives, wraiths called "Actors"

who penetrated the electronic barrier that enshrouded the planet and left fumes that hipsters trapped and sniffed, fumes which blocked the soma and allowed people to think again.

M-80 was a normally goofy thirteen-year-old boy whose father, T-3, was administrator for his block. The story began with M-80's astonished discovery of a puddle of water: In the land of machines, water was controlled by pipes, and M-80 had never seen water except from a faucet. Being different in the City was a punishable offense, and the mechanical aberration cost M-80's block its life. T-3 went to the council to defend his community, but his enemy G-92, who had "carefully cultivated for years, to advertise himself as a tireless champion of some kind, for some cause, whatever cause they wanted," blocked any humanity, prevented even a farewell speech, and sent T-3 back to die in his home, Zone 38383939383-338373.

Hip and funny, "cityCityCITY" neatly expressed Jack's anarchistic disgust at the technocracy that smothered him, and G-92 was a precisely inscribed portrait of "Tail-Gunner Joe McCarthy." To Jack, freedom was a spiritual rather than economic or political quality, "another word," as a poet later sang, "for nothing left to lose." One should free oneself of attachment, see all as illusion, and enter the void.

So Jack tended a little garden in his back yard, fought with Memere--Lucien came to dinner and was shocked to hear him call her "you dirty whore"--and tried to get by. He

worked two days as a brakeman for the New York Dock Railway, but his arm swelled and he had to quit. What he could not know was that his frustrated professional life was about to erupt in the dangerous fire of success. In May he found his first--and only--serious agent, Sterling Lord. Lord was a sophisticated man with a genuine love of literature, a fine taste in wines, and a French wife, all of which endeared him to Jack and Memere. "Trust in the Lord" became their slogan. If in the end Jack's closest friends thought Lord a businessman more interested in sensation than literature, his presence was reassuring in 1954. At the same time, Malcolm Cowley sent Jack's work to Arabelle Porter of New World Writing, who bought an excerpt from "On the Road" called "Jazz of the Beat Generation," which was published the following year. "Invitation to Innovators," Cowley's August 21 article in Saturday Review, singled out Jack as the man who invented the phrase "Beat Generation," whose "unpublished narrative 'On the Road' is the best record of their lives." It was a beginning.[6]

In Richmond Hill, Jack continued with his Buddhist studies, although he began to equivocate. He concluded that he was a more flexible Taoist rather than a Buddhist ascetic, because the character flaws that prevented him from holding a normal job also made asceticism too difficult. Too weak, too sensual, and too sensitive to cope, he withdrew one step from normal reality through alcohol and Buddhism into a private and internal sanctuary, as he later wrote, "to see

the world from the viewpoint of solitude and to meditate upon [it] without being embroiglio'd in its actions, which by now have become famous for their horror and abomination . . . a man of Tao, who watches the clouds and lets history rage beneath." He showed his manuscript of "The Subterraneans" to Ailene and Gregory. Years later Corso would say of the book that it "was very straight, it wasn't fiction, and that's what I say is so good about it." Now Jack thought Gregory was "contemptuous," and before Ailene would return the manuscript Jack almost had to break her door down. So Jack fled reality again, getting drunk with Lucien and also writing two pieces on Buddhism. The first defined life as a "Dream Already Ended," and replicated the Diamond Sutra in Jack's own language, a new solo on an old riff. "The Little Sutra" condemned Allen's cherished twinkly-eyed Chaplinesque love as nothing but hypocritical Western lust, and repeated the commandments to suffer and be kind.

Jack's thriving faith carried over into his West Coast correspondence. In April he had written a snide note to the Cassadys acidly informing them that the world--including the porkchops they had quarreled about--was all dancing illusion painted on the water. Given a little time to smile, Jack was soon writing friendly love notes to Carolyn interspersed with lectures that life was a dream, that only Dharmakaya, the Truth Essence, was real. Carolyn should suffer and practice pity towards poor tortured Neal, whose anxious self-

hatred was merely the product of non-enlightenment, of not having seen beyond the transitory. Neal had taken a Rorschach Test, and the psychiatrists had classified him as prepsychotic, anxiety prone, sadistic, and generally sick. Jack advised Carolyn that she knew how wild her man was, while the doctors only measured it. In Jack's view, Neal mostly needed love.

When Carolyn caught Neal and Allen having sex together and evicted Allen in a screeching rage that reminded Ginsberg of his mother's paranoia, Jack shrugged benevolently and tried to soothe everyone's feelings from three thousand miles away. A month after the incident, Carolyn apologized to Allen and invited him to visit. By then Allen had a suit and tie, a market research job, a hip and pretty girlfriend named Sheila, a developing network of San Francisco poet friends that included Kenneth Rexroth and Robert Duncan, and another problem; Bill was still ravenously in love with him and had left Tangiers in September 1954 to join Allen in San Francisco. Neal was of no use in this crisis, since he spent his time off the railroad in bed jacking off, lecturing on Cayce, or playing chess. Burroughs' romantic technique had an alien strangeness, employing the cruel strength of the dependent lover--"You don't love me any more!"--to seduce the now temporarily straightened out Allen.

When Bill stopped in Richmond Hill on his way west, Jack was begrudgingly involved in the affair. Jack watched Bill write love letters to Allen and pondered what a mysterious,

terrifying man he was, remembering what the demon of junk and boys had written to him earlier in the year: "I say we are here in human form to learn by the human hieroglyphs of love and suffering . . . it is a duty to take this risk, to love and feel without defense or reserve." Trying to reassure his former teacher, Jack lied that Allen still wanted to be with Burroughs or he would have written; actually, he thought Allen had ditched Bill because he was too bizarre. Gilding the truth produced several letters of accusation, denial, explanation and argument among the three of them, with Jack serving as a foil for other people's pain. He had pain enough of his own, and grew further aggravated by the way Burroughs totally ignored his Buddhism. Infuriated, Jack denounced the way Allen had involved him in the love problems of homosexuals--about which he vowed he knew nothing--and accused Allen of being the devil, although he conceded that he might be insulting an angel as well. The lovers, Jack said, would have to face each other in mutual confession, while he planned to be celibate and break the wheel of birth and death by relinquishing lust.[7]

It was October, Jack's month of breezy absolution and cleansing. Jack was working on a piece about Lowell when the autumn leaf smell blew down from New England and across the industrial wasteland of Richmond Hill, teasing his nose and memories; he got on the subway to Port Authority terminal and caught a bus to his home town. Too ghostlike

and mysterious and mentally far away to stay with GJ or the Sampas family, Jack slept at the skid row Depot Chambers Hotel and walked mile after mile around town, recognizing old friends as he passed unnoticed. His Japanese plaid shirt, white crepe sole shoes, blue jacket and brown corduroy trousers felt effeminate in Lowell, but he chomped on crisp red apples, puffed on a corncob pipe, and tried to transcend his fears and unravel the fabric of his life. Mary Carney was the only old friend whom he approached, but their silent parlor visit in front of the television was stiff, and he was glad to flee after a couple of hours.

In Lowell the only appropriate place for a sorrowful mystic was in church, and there he came alive. Immersed in the light of the stained-glass windows and the odors of incense and candle flame, he had a mystical experience, his first in twenty-eight years. It seemed as if the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary had turned to bless him. Suddenly Herbert Huncke's sad southern term "beat" made sense to Jack, signified "beatific," holy, compassionate, the ungrasping affection of the wearily downtrodden. As he knelt before the candles and crucifix, only the quality of his feeling mattered, and his devotion to Buddha was renewed and strengthened, his seeking after salvation confirmed in a moment of profound catharsis.

Walking down 52nd St. back in New York City, Jack saw

Norman Mailer with his new wife, Jack's old girlfriend Adele Morales, and Manhattan seemed like a carnival; rather than go to Richmond Hill, he headed down to his new hangout, The Montmartre Bar, where he met the brilliant young pianist Cecil Taylor and had an outstanding evening. Better still, Allen came east for his brother Eugene's wedding in mid-December, and their meeting at the San Remo was sweet. Allen felt beautiful in a good tweed suit and close-cropped head, and listened respectfully to Jack's lectures on his religious discoveries. Late in November, Jack had said that he had decided to stop letter writing, drinking, and all non-disciple friendships in a final effort to break his dualism and enter the light. The simple fact of eating cornflakes and sugar made him consider that taste itself was only an arbitrary conception.

With Allen once again seated across from him, he continued his correspondence teaching in a more humble mood, acknowledging that he was too drunken and ignorant to be a teacher; they were fellow seekers before the awesome Way. Thumping his manuscripts of poems, "Book of Dreams" (his recorded dreams), and "Some of the Dharma," he described his horror at the ignorance of the modern world, and his fear that creative but uncommitted poseurs--possibly himself--might misappropriate Buddhism and use its images and wisdom for aesthetic reasons instead of to further the Way. Allen related his own recent experiences, especially the peyotl

trip he'd taken with his lady friend Sheila and Al Sublette, a journey in which the Drake Hotel's two Starlite Roof bathroom windows became the eyes in a "Golgotha-robot-eternal-smoking-machine-crowned visage." Later Allen would call it "Moloch."

Starved for a responsive audience, Jack dominated their talk with his analysis of Buddhism as a Fellaheen thing, not of Lowell the town or Megalapolitan New York, but of the desert and the mountains. While in Lowell he'd dreamt of visiting Thoreau's hut at Walden Pond and finding a small box full of marijuana, and he was sure that it meant that his faith needed to live in the wilderness to survive. Surely it could never bloom in New York, where he drank and took Benzedrine and goof balls and dope, where hard-headed Catholic Memere scorned his faith, the publishers ridiculed him, and the police investigated his income. Joan Haverty still wanted child support, and the whole subject panicked him. On December 19, 1954 he wrote in his journal that he was "AT THE LOWEST BEATEST EBB OF MY LIFE . . . CONSIDERED A CRIMINAL AND INSANE AND AN IMBECILE, MY SELF SELF-DISAPPOINTED AND ENDLESSLY SAD BECAUSE I'M NOT DOING WHAT I KNEW SHOULD BE DONE A WHOLE YEAR AGO." In the desperate rote of a man on the edge of an abyss, he repeated that he must hew to the Way, walking calmly, practicing charity and sympathy to all "the hedgings and cavils of the world," so as to enter the bright holiness through his mind essence. With no attachments, no

sense-dependencies like drugs or false emotions, no fame, he might yet "free himself and release his own mind."

In mid-January of 1955, Jack went to court to contest Joan's paternity suit and demand for child support, and saw Joan for the first time in four years. She had converted to Catholicism, which intrigued him, and she scoffed a little at the material on Buddhism he packed about in a large manila envelope. The real shock came when she showed him a snapshot of four-year-old Janet Michele; after years of noisy denial, Jack acknowledged that she was probably his daughter. Miserable and alone before the bar of justice, Jack got lucky. He produced a letter from a VA doctor that documented his phlebitis and inability to work, and the judge set aside Joan's warrant. So long as Jack avoided riches or fame, he was free of his monetary obligations to Janet, and so long as he and Memere stayed totally out of her daughter's life, Joan didn't much care.

Relieved but disoriented by a massive sense of impending death, Jack got on the subway to go home, his fellow passengers unseen as he repeated that they were not real, that only mind essence was real. At home he redoubled his efforts in meditation, memorizing the Great Dharma of Lord Buddha's Crown Samadhi, reciting it on his knees even though the pain and swelling required him to tape his legs. Though he still drank

wine, popped amphetamines and smoked cigarettes, he felt sufficiently committed to the Way--and revolted by the commercialism of the publishing business--to order his agent Sterling Lord to pull back his manuscripts and cancel his "career," because from now on his writing would be strictly Buddhist. Mercurial as always, he allowed Lord to dissuade him, but focused on his meditations, one long Dhayana (meditation) a day, since it took him at least twenty minutes to quiet his mind. In the ache of his chastity he realized suddenly that his practices involved mind and body, that his football trained muscles could help him to reach Nirvana. As a form of piety he translated Tibetan sutras from the French and read secondary scholars, though he always preferred the emotional brilliance of the sutras.

By February he was gliding on a deep current of peace and satisfaction. He told Allen that he had had a "Dhyana of Complete Understanding," and while it was perhaps not so apocalyptic as that, he had broken through to a physical and emotional plane of tranquility that was altogether new to him.[8] Later that month he moved to North Carolina to help build Nin's new home and babysit for his nephew Paul, and his serenity did not dissipate immediately. In fact, he tried to build on it by reaching out to the Cassadys. Wry, gentle, and compassionate, he humbly confessed his guilt at their last quarrels, assuming full responsibility but reminding Neal that they were blood brothers, and there should be no

crap between them.

Jack wrote at his most vulnerable and hungover, because he had lost a god the week before. Charley Parker had been an obese alcoholic no longer able to play near his top when he died in New York City: He died on his birthday, March 12, 1955, one year older to the day than Jack. Although Jack tried to be flippant about it, his jokes were the defensive wit of a cruelly battered man.

Having already urged Allen to publish Neal's wild masterpiece the "Joan Anderson Letter," Jack exhorted Cassady to continue writing, assuring him that he was a peer of Proust, the best writer in America, blessed with an ear for the speech origins of language that far surpassed his own gifts in "On the Road." Carolyn disapproved of Neal's work because it was so sexual--a Cayce sin--but Jack defended it as a holy confession, and offered to type Neal's scribbles and send them back via the railroad. Chortling gently over the previous fall's crisis between Allen and Carolyn, Jack compared them to the "Three Stooges," and dismissed all their mutual conflicts as foolish. Even Cayce and reincarnation received his homage when he speculated that Neal, whom he thought had been born nine months after Gerard died, might through reincarnation be his brother in flesh as well as spirit.

Though harassed by loneliness and poverty in North Carolina, Jack was beatific as he tended a huge vegetable garden, typed up his latest book "Buddha Tells Us," an

American version of the Surangama Sutra, and worked on a biography of the Buddha to be called "Wake Up." Buddhism had not extinguished his ego: He told Allen that he would still be the best writer in the world, but his achievement would be measured by the thousands he might convert to the Way. Rocky Mount was like a Netherlands landscape to him, and he felt like Cezanne--sad, deep, and serene--as he walked into the piney woods to meditate under the stars. In lighter moments he sipped a concoction of white lightning, orange juice and ginger ale, satisfied with the companionship of his brother-in-law's two hound dogs. Memere was Nin's housekeeper and so happy to be free of the Blakean hell of the shoeshops that she was easier to get along with.

Most importantly, Jack's literary tensions were at least temporarily abated by the orgasmic pleasure of holding the latest issue of New World Writing in his hands. "Jazz of the Beat Generation" was in good company. One of the other pieces in the volume, "Catch 18," was by another unknown writer, Joseph Heller. Later that spring Paris Review would publish a section from "On the Road" called "The Mexican Girl," mellowing Jack so much that when E. P. Dutton rejected "Road" he still had enough perspective on his professional life to see it as flowers of illusion. He kept on with equanamity, particularly since Allen had been showing his manuscripts about San Francisco. Kenneth Rexroth, the reigning experimental critic in the Bay Area, had focused on

Jack in a radio show about that issue of New World Writing, and compared him favorably with Celine and Genet.

Nothing happened. New World Writing had reactivated Jack's hopes for publication, and all through May he waited for news from Lord. Allen comforted him with the thought that "I guess you're going mad in a way, as the termination of the process of consciousness of vision . . . but as Carl said Everything that's going to happen has happened already, so DON'T FLIP." Swimming in kindness, Jack replied sympathetically to Allen's struggles as a poet. Jewish writers had achieved national importance but overlooked their own best bard Ginsberg, who would, Jack promised, one day be acknowledged as a hero. Jack's letters mixed occasional inanity with compassion, as when he momentarily assured Allen that he had progressed past Enlightenment, past Buddhism because it too was an arbitrary conception.

Empty words came easily as the spring passed. His phlebitis was acting up and Nin kept harassing him about his drinking and zombie meditations--"You think you're God." More, he missed New York, its baseball games on bar TVs, the Village, waterfront walks, and French movies. In mid-June he borrowed ten dollars from Memere and went to the City for a brief drunk that included long talks with Lucien about death, huge orgies with Gregory, and a jangling set of business news.

Though Jack felt it was light-bringing and magical, "Buddha Tells Us" had been rejected by Malcolm Cowley,

Robert Giroux and Lord, and Viking had turned down Jack's request of twenty-five dollars a month to finish a new, Buddhist, "epic" "Road." More positively, he sold "city-CityCITY" to New American Reader and offered New World Writing a few more stories. Cowley and another editor at Viking named Keith Jennison continued to be interested in the original "Road," and late in July Cowley wrote to assure him of its publication, promising to write a foreward for the book, which would be published as "The Beat Generation." Even though there was still no contract, Jack felt glorious.[9]

Reassured by the news, a long and beautiful plea from Allen, and a gift of twenty-five dollars from Allen's brother Eugene Brooks, Jack took off to summer in Mexico. In September he would visit San Francisco before returning to live--like his heroes Thoreau, Dickinson, Blake--in a cottage; as Al Sublette had once said, all Jack really wanted was a "thatched hut in Lowell," and he was getting closer.

Two hundred and twelve Orizaba St., Mexico City, was very high and very creative after too much North Carolina boredom. Jack had a little adobe hut on the roof, with Burroughs' old junky friend Bill Garver down on the first floor for company. Though his abode had no water or electric-

ity and the door was fastened by a flimsy padlock, its candlelight was a good atmosphere for his continuing studies. On Sunday he read the sutra called Dana (Charity), on Monday Sila (Kindness), Tuesday Ashanti (Patience), Wednesday Vyra (Zeal), Thursday Dyana (Tranquillity), Friday Prajna (Wisdom), and Saturday the conclusion; the Diamond Sutra came every day. Sad and empty feeling, Jack plunked himself down in the rocking chair near Garver's own chair and started to listen to the old man. Garver was a twenty-year addict, the probable thief of half the overcoats stolen in Manhattan in the 1940s; by 1955 he rarely left his room, preferring to sit in purple pajamas and mumble unceasingly about Mallarmé, politics, his past, or Minoan civilization. Tall, wizard thin and tender, Garver intrigued Jack as much as he had bored Burroughs.

Continuously stoned on marijuana and occasionally floating on a gift shot of morphine from Bill, Jack was rather sedentary during this passage in Mexico City, lost in a never-never land sealed off from the smells of the crumbling building and the gay screams of the children who played all too closely to the unprotected roof edge. Wriggling into a comfortable position on Garver's bed as the soft drawl of Bill's voice droned on about him, Jack began to write spontaneous poems, meditations, mind-transcriptions which he later called "Mexico City Blues."

He was, he said, a "jazz poet blowing a long blues in

an afternoon jam session on Sunday. I take 242 choruses, ideas vary, roll from chorus to chorus." A chorus was defined only by the size of his notebook page, and otherwise he simply tried to direct the flow of his mind onto paper, its twists and turns, sketching his senses, sometimes dictating pure sound. Some of the choruses were parody and three--Numbers fifty-two through fifty-four--were Garver's own junked out talk. Jack's mind coursed over images of Corso, Burroughs, maps and rivers, and belief, "in Jesus, Buddha, St. Francis, Avalokitesvara." He touched on Gerard and doves, baptism and the path of the spiritual seeker: "No direction to go / (but) (in) ward."

Garver's choruses told of his fixation on suicide by an overdose of sodium amythol, "Blue Heavens." Then Jack soloed on reality; "Dharma law / Say / All things is made / of the same thing / which is a nothing." A demand to Joe McCarthy to "remove my name / from the list / And Buddha's, too," followed memories of Lowell days, Papa and his cigars. "Mexico City Blues" sang the blues for real, because "I get tired / of waiting in pain / in a situation / where I ain't sure." Near the end, his nakedness of mind complete, Jack snatched out of his brain one of the most spectacularly excellent expressions he was ever able to create in a life time of writing:

The wheel of the quivering meat
conception
Turns in the void expelling human
beings,
Pigs, turtles . . .
. . . . . .
Poor! I wish I was free
of that slaving meat wheel and safe
in heaven dead.

"Mexico City Blues" was a playfully serious word game, an eavesdropping on his inner mind, and his land; America, Jack concluded, "is a permissable dream."[10]

Jack continued to write after he finished the "Blues," this time about Esperanza Villanueva, Garver's dope connection and a goddess of the slums whom Jack romantically and chastely adored. A Catholic Indian with heavy Lady Day eyes and the trembling sexuality of a black orchid, Esperanza was locked inside a body strung out on ten grams of morphine a month. Writing in pencil by the sacramental light of a candle, Jack transcribed her tale, changing her name from Esperanza (Hope) to Tristessa (sadness); Hope did not express her junk truth, that she was, as the subtitle proclaimed, "Born to Die."

"Tristessa" was a religious meditation on pain as much as anything else. Following her around the slums, past the hobo Indians in shawls, the fruitstands, the pathetic displays of walnuts spread on towels on the sidewalk, Jack would go to her apartment with its kitten and dove and see the Buddha in her grim life. "I am sad because la vida es

dolorosa," he would say, his pidgin Spanish serving to convey the first law of suffering. She understood intuitively. When she sold her morphine on credit, Tristessa looked upward, clasped her hands, and said, "My Lord, he pay me back, more." Junked out himself, Jack reached to light a cigarette off the candle on her little altar, and then realized his error, begging Esperanza's pardon in French: "Excuse mué ma Dame." Later it occurred to him that he had meant "Dame" as in Damema, the mother of Buddha. Esperanza, though, was barren, and could bring no more pain into the world.

Mexico City was gentle and pleasant, but by mid-September it was time to leave for San Francisco. Jack had received the most remarkable invitation of his life, for Allen had sent him a copy of a new poem, a poem so good, so stupendously creative, that Jack's curiosity demanded he investigate what his old friend was up to in this new scene. Allen was planning to enter graduate school at Berkeley--Jack thought it was his natural mileau, though it would teach him nothing about prosody--but this new work bore Jack's jazzy-spontaneous swing, not the careful precision of academic poesy.

Jack dubbed the as yet untitled poem "Howl," and in terms of quality and social influence, it was undoubtedly the

most important poem of post-war America. After years of what he now conceded was "resenting and resisting" Jack's theories, Allen had taken a deep breath and let out a Whitman "Hebraic-Melvillian bardic" shout of rage at the twisted nation he called Moloch. Beginning with his Drake Hotel peyotl vision, he wrote what he called "a lament for the Lamb in America with instances of remarkable lamb-like youths":

> I saw the best minds of my generation,
> starving hysterical naked,
> dragging themselves through the negro streets
> at dawn looking for an angry fix,
> angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient
> heavenly connection . . .

In Part II he named the villain:

> Moloch whose love is endless oil and stone! Moloch
> whose soul is electricity and banks! Moloch
> whose poverty is the specter of genius!
> Moloch whose fate is a cloud of sexless
> hydrogen . . .

In Part III Allen answered Moloch with a call addressed to Carl Solomon, a cry to resist, an ideology of solidarity that brought the lament full circle into a gentle sharing: "Carl, I'm with you."

The child of sorrow and humiliations, the victim with the ashy taste of loss and self hatred in his mouth, the nice Jewish boy from Jersey had become a Prophet.

After making sure that "Howl" hadn't been rewritten--

he told Allen he wanted spontaneous work or nothing--Jack was thoroughly knocked out. Traveling up the coast towards the U.S.A., he must have sensed that something profound was about to occur. His own work was edging toward publication, Burroughs was developing awesome new routines, and this new poem--along with Allen's gossip about the exciting atmosphere in literary San Francisco--signalled a new breakthrough. The subterraneans were about to crawl blinking into the public light.

Crossing the border, Jack was something like a lyric spy come to aid the poetic revolution. "LET'S SHOUT OUR POEMS IN SAN FRANCISCO STREETS" he wrote Allen. "PREDICT EARTHQUAKES."[11]

CHAPTER XI

A REVOLUTION OF PROPHECY AND LIVING THINGS

Come writers and critics
Who prophecize with your pen
And keep your eyes wide
The chance won't come again
For the wheel's still in spin
And there's no tellin' who
That it's namin'
For the loser now
Will be later to win
For the times they are a-changin'
Bob Dylan

Poetry keeps the identity of the tribe alive--
Allen Ginsberg

The wind was howling and it was terribly cold in the gondola car of the train Jack was riding up the California coast towards Santa Barbra. To stay warm, he jumped around and flapped his arms and even meditated on the warmth of God; his companion, a shadowy, shrunken old hobo, sat hunched in a corner with the patience of the ages. After a while, Jack pulled out some bread and cheese and wine, and with thoughts of the Charity section of the Diamond Sutra, shared it with his comrade. Warmed by the wine, the old man also had a gift: He pulled out a slip of paper and shoved it gently over. Tugging it from dirty fingers, Jack read the prayer of his childhood patron St. Teresa, and of her promise that she would someday return to earth by showering roses over all living creatures.

Most Americans would have turned away in horror or disgust from the bum, would have seen him as a clown or simply

as a loser. That was one of the things that made Jack different, for he and his friends "were about transcending class," as the satirist Paul Krassner later said. "When you do this you don't feel superior to anybody," Krassner explained, "you learn from them all--the panhandlers and the hustlers. So your education is a product of experience rather than somebody else's distortion of experience." What road you chose was less important than the fact that you were on a road, pressing on the edge of experience.

Jack's democratic interest in all passers-by was a strange attitude in mid-50s America, for this was the land of Moloch, the land that had just lynched Emmit Till, the nation of a Republican President who was, one critic thought, a "Truman Democrat with the arms race as WPA." The Department of the Army was far more successful than the New Deal; the U.S.A. was the fastest growing country in history. Its GNP was 318 billion in 1950, nearly 400 billion in 1955. Its 200 largest manufacturers earned profits of 3.8 billion in 1954 and 5.2 billion in 1955. It was a consumer nation as none had ever remotely dreamed was possible. By the middle of the decade Americans had become familiar with TV, four engine airplanes, supermarkets, ranch homes, sophisticated food packaging, automatic transmission, power steering and power brakes for their cars, a whole range of antibiotics and vaccines, air conditioners, freezers, dishwashers, garbage disposals, FM radio, Hi-Fi, power boats and tranquilizers.

The colossal success of the new products generated a corresponding set of values. Though churchgoing, the majority of Americans accepted a mechanical universe, felt that man was nature's master and was capable of perfection, and celebrated optimism, consumerism, and conformity. One-tenth of all college students wanted a job that was particularly creative, and two-thirds of all adults believed that communist-written books should be banned. Three-quarters of all high school students felt that obediance was the single most important virtue. Younger children were marched off to Little League or Girl Scouts, taught "social skills" in school, and were chivvied into being the most security conscious generation in memory.

As a lonely radical periodical put it, "Power is everywhere openly or secretly idolized . . . those who should furnish vision and direction are silent or echoing old ideas in which they scarcely believe themselves." The periodical was Liberation, first published six months after Jack got to San Francisco. It was a pacifist-socialist anomaly in a time when the AFL and the CIO, having once meant radically different things, had merged. The language of the time was of euphemism, which is a euphemism for lie: Police action, coexistence, pinko.

Music reflected the consensus; people listened to the sophisticated but vapid work of Perry Como or Patti Page. Jazz was "tops" with college kids, but it was the white

stylization of the "cool" West Coast school, technically cute and emotionally sterile. Performers like Dave Brubeck--whom Jack disliked--had cleaned up jazz from its disreputable origins and cashed in by playing songs like "Blue Rondo à la Turk." Elvis Presley's towering influence was still confined to a limited group of restless kids bored with Eddie Fisher. The year's best-selling book was Marjorie Morningstar, another fable wherein Herman Wouk taught Americans how to sell out and be respectable. TV Guide was the major new U.S. periodical, along with Playboy, which had begun publication in 1953 but achieved popularity only in the prosperity of 1955. There the new rising middle class male could find easily digestable lessons in the right consumer goods--wine, clothing, cars, women--at a price that included titillation. One of Playboy's favorite subjects was Jayne Mansfield. Totally artificial in her bleached hair, abnormal make-up, tight clothing and phony little girl voice, Mansfield was, as her biographer later noted, the "perfect model of the moral and sexual dishonesty of the fifties." Perhaps the supremely evocative moment of the era took place on July 18, 1955, when the first clean, safe, homogenized amusement park opened under the name of "Disneyland."[1]

About the time that Jack pulled into San Francisco, Life issued its famous plea, "Wanted: An American Novel." According to Life, most American literature was seemingly "written by an unemployed homosexual living in a packing-box

shanty on the city dump while awaiting admission to the county poor house." Henry Luce's minions protested too much. Life had already discovered its tough-but-affirmative voice in the aging Papa Hemingway, who had contributed fifteen pieces in as many years to the magazine. What Life objected to was only the style, the querulous, fastidiously nose-sniffing tone of American poets and high culture critics. As one critic pointed out, there seemed to be no artistic heresy any more, as comfort, security, and peace of mind became the primary values of writers for Partisan Review, Kenyon Review, or the Hudson Review.

The intellectuals did not march lemming-like into Life's ponderous babbitry, but rather cringed in a passive and amoral middle, created neat worlds in bedlam, wrote ironic, ambiguous, remote but technically sophisticated pieces, sighed and taught English 1A. "Thus, the arriving poet, university trained to begin with," wrote John Ciardi, critic for Saturday Review and Princeton faculty member, "joins a university faculty, publishes primarily in university subsidy under university editorship, reads primarily the poetry and criticism that the universities sanction or have themselves developed, and when he publishes his own slim volume (quite possibly in a university press imprint) finds it reviewed for praise or damnation by university men in university magazines."

The various Reviews of fall 1955 had the usual contents;

Flannery O'Connor's "The Artificial Nigger," John Crowe Ransom on critical theory, Irving Howe on Dostoyevsky and poetry by Delmore Schwartz in the Kenyon Review. Partisan Review ran poetry by Ransom's fellow member of the Tennessee "Fugitive" school of criticism, Robert Penn Warren, and an essay on "The Intellectuals and the Discontented Classes" by Harvard's Riesman and Glazer. It was as if American high culture were a repertory theater that had only a few shows, and those by playwrights of remarkably similar values and background. The shows were all too often proficient exercises in incestuous trivia.[2]

In fact, there were only a very few threads in the culture that militated against the gray flannel. One was James Dean. An intuitive, high energy, non-intellectual and supra-emotional actor interested not in pretense or theatricality but truth, Dean was a moody bisexual devoted to drums and fast cars. He had died in a car crash on Highway 101 a day or two before Jack hitched past the same spot. The second thread was San Francisco itself; it was the end of the land, and for many reasons it was different from the rest of the country. The beauty of the setting and the Mediterranean "dolce far niente" relaxedness of the climate helped. Too, San Francisco had not experienced the Stalinist/Capitalist New York political split of the cold war, because from World War II on it had an active Anarchist Circle that welcomed draft resisters from the Waldport, Oregon, camp and never

succumbed to the rigidity of its East Coast brethren. Perhaps the atmosphere dated all the way back to the 1840s, when the city was settled, as Kenneth Rexroth pointed out, not by Protestant farmers and merchants like the rest of the nation, but by lunatic miners, whores, pirates, Latinos and Asians, scarcely a WASP child of virtue among them. Maybe it was just because it was three thousand miles and two enormous mountain ranges away from New York City. But it was freer, as Allen had already discovered.

After a peaceful night on the beach at Santa Barbara under a dark and diamond universe of stars, Jack caught an absurd ride from a gorgeous, half-clad blond driving a Mercury convertible, and very quickly ended up striding down the walk to Allen's cottage at 1624 Milvia St. in Berkeley. Allen was not the same morbid gloom monger Jack had known in New York; he was like a picture brought into tight focus for the first time, a mensch with a poem, a love, and a much more solid identity.

His love was named Peter Orlovsky, a dreamy refugee from a childhood spent in a Dickensian tie-making loft, a man who compared himself and his brothers--Lafcadio, Julius, Amiel and Nicky--to the Karamazovs, a "big strange dumbell saint," Jack thought, who guarded the gates of heaven like his namesake but was "so goofy he lets everybody in." In December 1954,

Allen had met painter Robert Lavigne in the subterraneans' San Francisco headquarters, Foster's Cafeteria at Polk and Sutter Streets. In between Allen's stories of William de-Kooning, Franz Kline, and the San Remo Bar, he went to Lavigne's apartment, where he was frozen by an enormous painting of a "naked boy with his legs spread," as he later described it, "and some onions at his feet, with a little Greek embroider on the couch. He had a nice, clean-looking pecker, yellow hair, a youthful teeny little face, and a beautiful frank expression." One minute later, Peter the model walked in. He had been Lavigne's lover, but that was about to end, and Lavigne suggested that Allen replace him. Allen was too eager, and the affair began with a period of horrors, bruised feelings and bitterness. At one point Allen even felt evil about his love and the agonies it had created, but time gradually eradicated the scars.

Eventually, Peter and Allen sat in Foster's and vowed mutual interpossession as Allen offered his intellect and Peter his body and love. They exchanged their pledge: "I do, I do, you promise? Yes, I do." As Allen later recalled, "at that instant we looked in each other's eyes and there was a kind of celestial cold fire that crept over us and blazed up and illuminated the entire cafeteria and made it an eternal place." Jack wrote offering his approval, and then Allen took another major step. After months of tortuous psychoanalysis, his psychiatrist deprecated his self-doubts and

said, "Why don't you do what you want?" Since Allen was afraid of being free to write poems, get high, and live with Peter, he raised various "square" objections, ending with, "What happens if I get old or something?" In a blessed moment of common sensitivity, the psychiatrist smiled and replied, "Oh, you're a nice person; there's always people who will like you." Shortly thereafter Allen wrote a report at work that led to his job being replaced by a computer, began to collect unemployment, and made the changes in his life that two months later allowed him to write "Howl."[3]

Allen's Milvia St. cottage was a simple room furnished with pillows, floor mats, a bookcase with Catullus and Pound and a Webcor phonograph stocked with Bach and Ella Fitzgerald, and Jack felt comfortable there. After he and Allen had shared their news, Allen told him of the upcoming big event: He had organized a poetry reading at the Six Gallery in San Francisco, and in two weeks he would read in public for the first time.

Neal showed up in one of his usual junker cars and zoomed them over the Bay Bridge, first to Vesuvio's, a North Beach bohemian bar, and then to the Six Gallery, an old garage with white walls, a dirt floor, one toilet whose door didn't lock--an audience and a stage. They were shocked to discover on their arrival that the Gallery was packed with

well over one hundred people. Kenneth Rexroth, the M.C. and Papa-critic of avant-garde San Francisco, greeted them with his gurgling half growl, half smile; in honor of the event he'd gone to Goodwill that day and come away with a spiffy gangster-pinstripe suit.

Rexroth had organized the first Six reading for C. P. member Walter Lowenfels, and when asked to put together another, he had sensed Allen's talent for organization and dumped the task on him. Delightedly bustling about in his role as producer, Allen selected as readers himself, a young poet he'd met around town named Michael McClure, and Jack and Neal's old friend Philip Lamantia. Rexroth had suggested he see a young student of oriental languages named Gary Snyder. Just back from a summer of work in the high Sierras, Snyder was fixing his bicycle in the yard of his Berkeley cabin when he saw "a cat with a flannel suit and tie and glasses . . . kind of sneaking around the corner." They shared some tea, and Allen read some of Snyder's poems with the comment, "Well, this is all right." Gary suggested two of his Reed College classmates, Philip Whalen and Lew Welch, and "Six Poets at the Six Gallery" was born. Its birth announcement was a wonderful postcard Allen sent out, a paper catalyst: "Six poets at Six Gallery. Remarkable collection of angels . . . serious poetry, free satori . . . charming event." Who could resist?

Lew Welch led off in front of the enthusiastic crowd

with his poem "Skunk Cabbage." The crowd liked it, and moved even further away from the usual pallid tea-and-crumpets decorum of poetry audiences when Jack collected money and brought back giant jugs of Burgundy, wandering around the room to offer everyone a healthy slug while cheerfully murmuring in chorus with Neal a running series of "Wow!", "Yes!" and commentary. Lamantia--whom Jack found a bit too delicate--followed Welch, reading the poems of his late friend John Hoffman. Then came McClure, at twenty-three the youngest reader, a biology student whose aim was "a new and truly wild and noble chivalry of blood fire and meat. No bullshit, the spirit finally and totally, violently freed." He read his elegy "For the Death of 100 Whales." By then Jack was leading a chorus of "Go!" "Go!" cheers to the rhythm of his thumping jug, and the room was starting to rock. Philip Whalen took the reading to a 10:45 P.M. break with a relaxed, lighter tone.

And then came Allen. No one but Jack had ever heard "Howl" before, and it was an electric event. Allen began slowly--"I saw the best minds of my generation, starving hysterical naked, dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn . . ."--but by the time he had reached the Part II declamation of Moloch he was raving in prophecy, swaying on his planted feet, a cantor wailing out doom, crying and naked before brothers and sisters who were as momentarily deranged as he, in an emotional holocaust unique to American

poetry. It was, as Lamantia later said, "like bringing two ends of an electric wire together." Visible in the beautiful fire of that arc was the fact that inside the Gallery was a community radically different from the America outside.

Sharing a basic rejection of values like materialism, the work ethic, and rationality as the highest level of reality, these new pilgrims were "an expression of religious radicalism in revolt against a rational conservatism," as historian Perry Miller had said of the Transcendentalists. Suddenly they were aware that the desire and talent for readings, for poetry itself, still existed. Snyder, Whalen, and Welch had all thought of themselves as essentially solitary, and only Lamantia had ever read in public before; now they knew that they weren't the only freaks, but rather members of a tribe, of a poetic resistance. Allen roared on, and the tribe was dumbfounded. "The room was filled with insanity," thought Whalen. "The poem destroyed any sense of the intellect and left everyone with a hollow sense of being." Apocalypse Now!

It could not have been easy for Gary Snyder to follow all that with his poem about the Indian God Coyote, "The Berry Feast," but follow he did, and Jack was particularly impressed. Later he wrote that Snyder's "voice was deep and resonant and somehow brave, like the voice of old time American heroes and orators." Jack went along with the poets to Sam Lo's for a post-reading Chinese supper, and as Snyder showed him how to

order and use chopsticks, all the while telling humorous Zen lunatic anecdotes, Jack became more and more intrigued with him.

The reading night of October 13, 1955, had been profound for Jack, for in its course he made several friends and a later enemy.[4] Rexroth was the man he would eventually antagonize. At a jolly planning meeting a week before the reading, Jack had pulled his moustache and kissed him, but Rexroth was a man with passionate and constantly shifting "shit lists," and he would swiftly sentence Jack the outsider to such ignominy. Born in 1905, Rexroth had been a member of the 1920s "Chicago Renaissance" with Carl Sandburg, Theodore Dreiser, and Vachel Lindsay, and when that had petered out, he had come to San Francisco. An authentic and independent radical, Rexroth had taken part in the war-time "Libertarian Circle," and through his KPFA radio program--itself a mark of San Francisco's unique freedom--he encouraged poetry in an atmosphere that reflected his work in the woods and the longshoreman Harry Bridges more than any academic scene.

A second major actor in Jack's future, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, had also attended the reading. With a background that included a B.A. from the University of North Carolina, the rank of Lt. Commander after nearly five years in the U.S. Navy, a Columbia M.A., a Ph.D. from the Sorbonne, and his present

occupation as a merchant, Ferlinghetti should have been out of place. He wasn't. Later he would insist that his dissertation title was "The History of the Pissoir in French Literature"; his business was in fact the hippest book store in America. Graduate school on the Boulevard St. Michel had made him not an academic nit-picker but an aesthete with a taste for Parisian life. Early in the fifties Ferlinghetti had left New York for San Francisco--"the only place I knew of," he said, "where you could get decent wine cheap"--and in 1953 he was a partner in the City Lights Bookstore, probably the first paperback bookstore in the country. The idea was for the shop to support a magazine of the same name. The magazine soon folded and Ferlinghetti's partner sold out, but they never could get the store doors closed. A coffeehouse without the coffee, City Lights' late hours and relaxed ambiance made it an instant and ongoing success. In the French tradition, Ferlinghetti decided to open a publishing house over his store, and so he created the "Pocket Poets" series--inexpensive, democratic, one of literary America's finer traditions. By 1955 he had published his own Pictures of the Gone World, and for 1956 he'd scheduled books by Kenneth Rexroth and Kenneth Patchen. Shortly after the Six reading he and Allen agreed to publish "Howl." Jack would have little contact with him until a few years later.

Philip Whalen, "180 pounds of poet meat" as Jack described him, Jack immediately liked. Later he swore to Phil

that meeting him and Snyder had been the secret, unfathomable reason that had drawn him back to California against his will. Imperturbably puffing on his pipe, Phil always seemed a touchstone of sensibleness to Jack, and though his background--rural Oregon, the Army, Reed College--was quite unlike Jack's, they got on well. Whalen had eaten peotl that summer of 1955, and it had loosened him tremendously, so when Gary had written about the reading he had come to San Francisco. A student of Buddhism, he felt alien in America, and was charmed by Jack, who had such deep ethnic roots, from the way he ate to the authors--Balzac, Proust, Rabelais--with whom he identified.

But Gary Snyder was Jack's new hero. He seemed like Walt Whitman,

> Me imperturbe, standing at ease in Nature,
> Master of all or mistress of all, aplomb in
> the midst of irrational things,
> Imbued as they, passive, receptive, silent as they,
> Me wherever my life is lived, o to be self-balanced
> for contingencies . . .

Like a piece of oak he was, close-grained, balanced, strong and beautiful, his "peace and purposefulness" wondrous to Jack. Here at last was a hip, energetic man hung up neither on the Ginsbergian intellectualities Jack couldn't stomach nor the aimless frenzy of Neal. Just before the reading Jack had come off a ruinous binge that left him exhaustedly wrung out, tortured with Gerardian dream premonitions of his own death; he had been hanging out with Neal

at the racetrack, agonizedly caught up in Neal's driving and constant get-high. Worse still, Cassady now lived in Los Gatos, a suburb sixty miles south of San Francisco, in a new house without a guest bedroom. There were no peaceful Carolyn dinners on this visit, only hurtling flights over the San Francisco hills and bejabbering Cayce monologues. Gary's Zen-simple place on Berkeley's Hillegass St. was nothing like that. Furnished with straw mats and orange crates stuffed with books of poetry and oriental religion, the cottage bespoke an ordered, contemplative life.

They had first met on their way to the pre-Reading meeting with Rexroth. As Jack and Allen had waited for the other poets on a street corner in North Beach, Jack noticed a small, tough man, "wiry, suntanned, vigorous, open," toting a rucksack stuffed with books and a toothbrush. Except for expensive hiking boots, Snyder wore the durable working class corduroy and flannel Jack favored, and the sharp contrast between Snyder's workshirt and Allen's suit formed Jack's first impression of the man. Later, when Jack told him of his experience with the St. Teresa prayer carrying hobo, Gary pronounced the old man a Bodhisattva, and the harmony of their class and religious sensitivities led them swiftly into intimacy.[5]

A few nights later, Jack strolled over to Gary's place to be charmed by its functional beauty, and as they talked late into the night about the poems of Han Shan that Gary was

translating, with Gary himself. After two years of talk about a solitary mountain shack, Jack had found the guide who could lead him there. Like his master the Chinese spiritual pioneer and hermit Han Shan, Gary was a "poet, mountain man, Buddhist man of solitude" able to live, Jack thought, "purely and true to himself." His poetry--about camp fires, bear shit, work and trees and Coyote--was a "rip rap (steps) on the slick rock of Metaphysics," Snyder said, short, tough, simple words whose goal, in the words of one critic, was to "enable the traveler to ascend--to ascend on earth, not to slide back nor to fly." His poems recreated the wilderness in the mind, not a flowers-and-Bambi fantasy but the real thing: "the city's not so big, the / hills surround it." Gary had eaten of the bear of solitude, a lesson Jack desperately needed to learn. More, Snyder had what he called his "greatly enjoyed tricks of living on nothing" to cope with the economic realities of the city.

Gary was twenty-five when he met Jack, having grown up on a scratch farm in Oregon. A childhood accident made him bedfast for several months and opened his mind to books, especially the glorious Indian studies of Ernest Thompson Seton; throughout his youth Indian lore and old I.W.W. anarchist stories were his companions as he roamed, whenever possible, in the woods. Zen Buddhism captured his imagination and became the core of his life. After graduating from Reed College in 1951, he went to Indiana University to

study Anthropology but left after a semester to pursue Asian languages at Berkeley. At the time he met Jack he was preparing to enter a Zen monastery in Japan. He'd had his troubles, of course. Once married, now divorced, he had also been blacklisted out of the forestry lookout service as a communist; Jack the rabid anticommunist thought he'd probably espoused anarchy at some meeting, and dismissed the charge as foolish.

I.W.W. anarchist, student of Indians, Zen adept, Gary was first of all a woods child. Drop him in the middle of the High Sierras naked with a penknife and he could walk out a week later clothed--should it be cold--and healthy.

Jack and Gary's relationship wasn't simple adoration on Jack's part. Gary had already read "Jazz of the Beat Generation" in New World Writing and was much interested in its author. A few nights after the Han Shan talk, Allen, Philip and Jack visited him with wine and manuscripts, and he read "Mexico City Blues," which he later called "the greatest piece of religious poetry I've ever seen." The four of them had a wonderful evening of poetic communion, Gary and Allen arguing about Ezra Pound (Gary pro, Allen con), whom Jack had discovered only a year before. Late that night the three visitors returned to their homes, walking through the peaceful autumn college-town streets singing and laughing. It was perhaps the best October Jack had ever

known.

More exotic was the night Gary appeared at the Milvia St. cottage with a lady friend named "Princess," threw a red bandanna over the lamp, and initiated a small orgy. Allen, ever-eager, was naked in a flash, but Jack had been chaste for a year and had always been dubious about being nude in front of anyone. After much persuasion he began to caress her arm while still clothed, and before long he was as enthusiastic as Allen, his chastity rocked away in the rhythm of his frantic intercourse with Princess. He wound up sharing a bath with her, where she reassured him that she was a guilt free "Earth Mother Bodhisattva," while a naked Gary rolled a Bull Durham cigarette and lectured on "Zen Free Love Lunacy" and Tibetan concubines.[6]

Jack differed from Gary in his practice of Buddhism, for he thought of himself as a "dreamy" Mahayana Buddhist concerned only with mitigating the first truth of suffering with compassion, and felt that Gary's Zen studies were rather intellectual. A few years later he would say that "Zen ideas are only technical explanations without tears and truth," and in a bitter moment still later, that Zen was "the invention of [the Hindu God] Mara the Tempter . . .The Devil's personal war against the essential teaching of Buddha." In truth, it was as Snyder said, "a split that didn't exist." Zen was part of Mahayana, differing from it in practice and style, most notably in the use of koans, mind cracking questions flung at

a student by his or her Roshi (teacher), as the student had to "spit forth truth or perish." Koans were designed to derail the mind from its ordinary sequential thought pattern and release it into an extended realm of spontaneous perception. Neither a philosophy nor an organized system, Rinzai Zen was an art form traditionally associated with practices like archery, flower arranging, painting or haiku, in which the student labored over a technique that focused the mind and body into one, until the technique became transcended into artlessness, the artist one with the art, the art and the artist one. In such a state of grace, the action attained the pure unconscious elan of spontaneity--freedom after total discipline. Then the bowman aims not at his target but at himself; the mind gone, the enlightened one is aimless, egoless, purposeless, "childish" and uncalculating, and wholly alive.

The first koan was said to date from the time that Sakayamuni, the Buddha, gave a discourse by silently sitting in front of his disciples with a flower in his hand; only Maha Kasyapa smiled, and he would inherit the teachings. Obsessed with death and sin, Jack could follow Buddha's truths in an emotional and ethical way, but could not step off into the no-zone terrors of Zen where everything--intellect, emotion, spirit--was discarded. His approach to Buddhism was more prayer than meditation, and where Zen was of the present, Jack was fascinated by the pageant of Lotus Sutra

eschatology and legend. The following Zen anecdote would not have appealed to him: "One night Te Shan was attending Master Lung Tan, who said, 'It is now late. Why don't you go back to your room and retire?' Te Shan then said good night to his Master, and went out. But immediately he returned, saying, 'It is dark outside.' Lung Tan lit a candle and handed it to Te Shan, then suddenly blew it out. At once Te Shan was awakened." Master Bo Shan argued that the koans and stories were designed to generate the "I chin," the doubt sensation. Already consumed in doubts, Jack preferred to contemplate his and Gary's favorite saint, Avalokitesvara, the Kwannon Bosatsu, the Bodhisattva of Compassion, the Buddha of the human voice. Part of the Surangama Sutra said of him, "His body of love he keeps under control like thunder that shakes the world; his thought of compassion resembles a great mass of cloud from which a rain of the Dharma comes down like nectar, destroying the flames of evil passions. [His is] a most exquisite voice, a voice that surveys the world . . . that excels all the voices of the world."[7]

Like any student whose Roshi happened to be Han Shan, Jack had to go into the mountains. Late in October he happily went climbing for a weekend with Gary and a friend named John Montgomery. John was an odd duck, a librarian whose wittily sarcastic stream of surreal babble entertained them as they

drove towards the Matterhorn, in the country east of Yosemite Park. Jack made them stop at a bar that night for a drink--heavy wine had no place with the lightweight bulgur wheat, tea, dried vegetables, nuts and fruit in their rucksack--and though he grew disgusted with the mighty hunter oafs lurching around, the Christian Brothers Port did its mellow duty, and they were pacific as they went to sleep.

After a fine country breakfast, Gary drew the first mandala Jack had ever seen for good luck, and they set out. Floating on the rhythm of the trail, Jack crowed with the virtuous joy of a new convert, enthusing over the superiority of nature to boozing in North Beach's The Place, his new San Francisco hangout. Roshi Snyder reproved him with a stern voice and a twinkling eye. "Comparisons are odious," he said. "It's all the same old void." Montgomery's flood of chatter might have proven distracting to them, but early on John realized that he would have to return and put antifreeze in the car, and catch up with them later. Quieted by the sorcery of the Matterhorn, they hiked through fields of mountain lupine as deja vu past lives flashed through Jack's mind. Moving higher, they had to clamber up a boulder field, dancing gracefully from rock to rock in a stark world of wind and water and stone until they reached a ledge and camped for the night.

Words were impotent, and Jack described the moment simply: "Here now, the earth was a splenderous thing."

Gary's most exquisite lesson was the harmony Jack felt at that moment, not a "harmony with nature," as a critic said of Gary's poetry, "but an inner human harmony that was equivalent to the natural external harmony." Through Gary Jack had dredged out of his intuition the philosophical meaning of the word ecology, and he revealed it in his description, two years later in a book he called "The Dharma Bums," of two speck-humans and a universe of stone called the Matterhorn.

Four years before Rachel Carson's Silent Spring, Jack had no understanding of a scientific ecological view. But "as in most other things," Gary said, "he had a strong natural intuitive sense of interconnection, Karma." All is one. Having rejected the path of Aristotelian yes/no logic, Jack sensed the interdependence of life, the true subject of ecology. Or as Gary put it in a poem written at this time, homo sapiens was not an ideal, not a creation apart, but

> A skin bound bundle of clutchings
> unborn and with no place to go
> Balanced on the boundless compassion
> Of diatoms, lava, and chipmunks.

Snyder's love for the American Indian culture was no accident, but a recognition that it was the only ecologically sane model available in post-war America, sane in the sense of preserving earth's life cycle, and sane

in nurturing the full potential of humans as well. "As poet," he wrote, "I hold the most archaic values on earth. They go back to the late Paleolithic: the fertility of the soil, the magic of animals, the power-vision in solitude, the terrifying initiation and re-birth, the love and ecstasy of the dance, the common work of the tribe. I try to hold both history and wilderness in mind, that my poems may approach the true measure of things and stand against the unbalance and ignorance of our times." History may well record that his vision was the most important result of the San Francisco poetry renaissance.

As Gary had predicted, there was no need for wine in the clean thin air of their ledge, the mountain looming above them like a praying Buddha and the roar of silence in their ears. They had tea, and talked a bit. Jack captivated Gary when he told him of his special prayer, which listed people--friends, enemies--"so and so equally empty, equally to be loved, equally a coming Buddha." Then they meditated, Jack in turn impressed that Gary did so with his eyes open, the two of them poised on the lip of space as the sky blushed from pink to purple to black, and night fell. Dinner was simple and good, although Jack couldn't work his chopsticks, and they passed an hour while Gary pointed out constellations. Just before they slept, he gave Jack his prayer beads--

in return, he said, for the special prayer. Amazed by Gary's lovely sense of charity, Jack slipped off to sleep remorseful about his boozy, wastrel life, but vowing to do better. He had no nightmares that night.

In the morning John joined them, and they pushed on, Gary leading the way up the scree; the path grew steeper and steeper, the wind began to howl like the authentic wrath of God, and Jack's legs turned to lead. John quit, but Jack pushed on, his lungs on fire with faster and faster gasps. Impossible deja vu sensations disoriented him, and he pondered in horror the Zen saying, "When you get to the top of the mountain, keep climbing." He heard Gary's shout of triumph from the top, but was too tired to respond, depleted by fear and exhaustion. Suddenly Gary whizzed by, almost running down the mountainside, and Jack divined that "it's impossible to fall off mountains you fool" and leaped after him into the void, graceful as jazz, yelling with joy as he grasped, satori-like, that "you just have to do it."[8]

As they cut along a deer trace back to the car, Jack's leg muscles knotted and he reviled himself as a coward, ashamed of his desire to stop. Nonetheless, for the moment he was a Dharma Bum, a member of those "who refuse," as Gary said, "to subscribe to consumption," a commando in the "rucksack revolution of drop outs." Gary was a sophisticated political thinker who sought a "hopefully

decentralized anarcho-syndicalism as ultimate goal," and Jack couldn't accept his entire message. Essentially apolitical, Jack tried to follow Confucious and "avoid the authorities," but he was happy, back in town, to outfit himself at the Army-Navy store with a good sleeping bag of his own, a fine nylon poncho, cook pots, and a rucksack--all that he needed for self-sufficiency as a bhikku, a religious wanderer.

November passed pleasantly, sweetened by a positive letter from Malcolm Cowley and a nicely wild visit to Carolyn in Los Gatos. Neal had moved into the city to live with his new love Natalie Jackson, but after years of effort Carolyn had heeded the Caycean advice to "keep still," and Neal visited her regularly. During Jack's visit, the three of them were lounging comfortably in the living room as Neal cleaned his new supply of grass. There was a knock at the door, and Neal leaped up to answer it, leaving the weed strewn colorfully over the coffee table. Cassady yanked open the door and greeted, his heart in his throat, a police officer. Fortunately the constable was only there for another sixty dollars in traffic tickets, and after hemming and hawing and scratching up the fine, Neal collapsed back onto the couch to join Jack in hysterical giggles. Carolyn was not amused.

She enjoyed the bishop's visit much more. A slight young man with a puttylike face, the reverend had dropped by with his mother and aunt to pay a call on Carolyn, and had

collided with Jack, who quoted the Diamond Sutra, Neal, who lectured on Cayce, and Allen, who wanted to know about sex. Electrified by a good argument, the bishop changed from an effete nothing into a man possessed, and held his own and then some during the afternoon's dialogue; Jack thought he was secretly a stud, and a few years later he would utilize the charming afternoon as the extremely loose basis for a play and movie called "Pull My Daisy."

On November 30, 1955, Jack stopped by Neal and Natalie Jackson's apartment in San Francisco to say goodbye for a while. The city had grown too cloying for him, and he was ready to search for a clean, quiet place in the wilderness. What he found at Natalie's was proof that he should have remained in the mountains. Neal's romance with Natalie had been special among his affairs, so special that he had even written her his first letters in years. But Natalie had been unable to cure him of his massive addiction to gambling; deeply in debt, he had convinced her to forge Carolyn's signature on a five thousand dollar check. Now she was paying the price. Natalie had always been thin, but now she was wasted, her eyes wild and terrified, the scars on her wrists still livid. Riding the bitter edge of paranoia, she kept hissing at Jack, "Now they know everything about you."

Neal had to go to work, and asked Jack to guard her. He was reluctant, but a quote from the Bible convinced him.

Infected by her fear during the long wait for Neal's return, Jack lost his patience the way he always did in trying to explain Buddhism to his family or Allen or his girlfriends, who felt, Jack was sure, that he was a slightly daft dreamer in a serious world. "It's nothing but bullshit!" he yelled at Natalie, "God is you, you fool!" Later he brought a small party back to the apartment, and she quieted down. But after Neal returned and fell asleep, she went up on the roof and cut her wrists. When one of San Francisco's finest approached her, she jumped over the edge. In the Hearst tradition, the newspapers went berserk with a North Beach "bohemian suicide."

Sickened with death and the city, Jack left San Francisco a few days later, after a day in the park with Gary and a farewell Chinese dinner with Phil. In Los Gatos, he tried to comfort Neal, who was praying for Natalie to survive the horrible karma of suicide that Cayce taught. After a short stay, Jack caught the Midnight Zipper to Los Angeles and met another hobo with a religious quotation and something else; he advised Jack to stand on his head every day for his phlebitis, and it worked. A bus to Calexico at the border let him dodge the smog and the infamous L.A. police. In Calexico a lonely trucker violated the rules that prohibited riders and carried Jack all the way to snowy Ohio, where another bus brought him across barren cotton-fields to Rocky Mount, home for Christmas. A warm cat in

his lap, he read St. Paul and grew nauseated at the bishop's rich vestments at St. Patrick's Cathedral on Christmas Eve, preferring his own little meditation spot in the piney woods in back of the house. Nin and her family were gone for Christmas, as was Memere, who had left for a month in Brooklyn due to her stepmother's funeral.[9]

With no one to talk with, Jack more or less had to write a book. It was religious, but not explicitly Buddhist. Three months before, "Mexico City Blues" had, due to the grass and morphine, sent him deep into his past, and thoughts of one funeral took him back to his first one. "Death is the only decent subject," Jack wrote, "since it marks the end of illusion and delusion." So he told of the most important death in his life, that of Gerard's. First called "St. Gerard the Child" and finally "Visions of Gerard," the tale was too lacrimose for most readers when it was later published, but it was less a novel and more a passionate elegy. Much of its detail came from the letters Papa Leo had written Jack during college, though he also recreated his childhood by eating peanut butter on Ritz crackers and playing his card baseball game as of old.

On January 1, 1956, he sat down at the kitchen table and for twelve nights wrote steadily by hand--it was no subject for a "rackety typewriter," he said--from midnight to dawn. Whizzing along on benny and tea, he continued to write spontaneously, although he did reject all of

one night's work. The language was windblown and Shakesperian, and especially sensitive to nature in a voluptuously swirling description of spring. It also showed an exquisite sensitivity to the oneness of the rain, creek, river, and ocean. Aside from his references to Avalokitesvara, Jack did not forget Buddhism. "Visions of Gerard" asked, "Who will be the human being who will ever be able to deliver the world from its idea of itself that it actually exists in this crystal ball of mind?" Like an old man fingering souvenirs of his far away youth, Jack recounted his memories of Gerard and the sparrows, their visits to the Franco-American orphanage grotto, the freeing of the mouse. Who would deliver the world from illusion? "One meek little Gerard with his childish ponderings shall certainly come closer than Caeserian bust provokers with quills and signatures--and cabinets and vestal dreary laceries--I say."

As if to balance the purity of his prayer in Gerard's memory, Jack visited New York and hit the bars, only to feel old and burnt out amongst a blithe new generation, flinching as he watched Ailene kiss another man at the Montmartre Bar. Catastrophically, he also discovered that Cowley was not in New York, where they were supposed to complete editorial work on "On the Road," but at Stanford University, which Jack had just left, and the confused delay set back "Road's" publication by six months. The fact that Lucien--hard drinking, cynical reporter Lucien--liked "Visions of Gerard" was the

only salve for this deep new bruise, but somehow Jack didn't plunge into his usual quagmire of depression.

Back in North Carolina, he found a letter offering him a job as lookout on Desolation Mountain in Washington State's Mt. Baker National Forest; he would follow as bhikku in Roshi Snyder and Roshi Whalen's path. Now his life had a linchpin, and he planned it out--summers in the wilderness, fall and spring in Mexico, Christmas and winter in North Carolina with his family--a rich and full cycle that cherished him. With his five hundred dollar summer wages, he even daydreamed out loud about founding a monastery for what he called "Pure Essence Buddhism" near Mexico City.

Safe again in his piney woods and prayer arbor, he meditated deeply and felt increasingly at peace. A spring-like day in February followed by a moonlit, frog-croaking night put him near ecstasy, and he worked in perfect contentment on what he called his "Book of Prayers." It included the Diamond Sutra, the Hridaya Prajna paramita, Gary's translation of Han Shan's poem "Cold Mountain," and his own work, like "The Money Prayer." More than his richly tranquil mood convinced him that he was entering a state of grace, for he had had two significant psychic experiences. The whole family had been interested when Nin had brought home the current best-seller on reincarnation, The Search for Bridey Murphy, though the Cassadys had long ago introduced

Jack to the notion of past lives. Deep in renewed meditation, he had encountered seven prior selves, and claimed to Carolyn that he had once been Avalokitesvara, Asvaghosha, a monk, a pot-boy, Shakespeare, an 18th Century English footpad-thief, and Balzac. On the earthly plane, Memere had come down with a sneeze and cough that struck Jack as unnatural. He went to bed and meditated and "saw" a Heet linement bottle, a brandy bottle, and some white flowers. Going into Memere's room, he put the Heet on her throat and saw the flowers, and took them away. Later a doctor confirmed that she had an allergy. Though he tried to guard himself against a messiah complex, he felt that he was a channel of God, "dealing in outblowness, cut-off-ness, snipped, blownoutness, putoutness, turned-off-ness . . . gone-ness, gone out-ness, the snapped link, nir, link, vana, snap!"

A dharma bum was welcome at the Zen Center in San Francisco, but didn't fit in socially with the "good ole boys" of Big Easonburg Woods, North Carolina. No one had taken to following him down the road with a shotgun, but any man who didn't comb his hair or shave and went about barefoot in overalls like a child was a lunatic in their eyes. When Jack tried to explain that all was empty illusion, they looked to one side and told him to stick to the religion he was born with. Jack would pout, and then the frustration crept into his dreams, where he'd taste success with Dinah Shore until

his gauche Canuck autograph hound mother and sister would embarrass him.[10]

Late in March Jack learned that Gary Snyder had a place for him to stay in Mill Valley, before Jack left for his Desolation Mountain job and Gary boarded a freighter to Japan and the Daitoku monastery. Jack quickly hit the road in a desperate attempt to catch Malcolm Cowley at Stanford, but Cowley was already gone, and the trip was a nightmare. He fried in the roadside South Carolina heat, and finally took a bus he could not afford to El Paso, where he ended up drunk and frightened by his Nogales hipster dope connection. He wobbled back into the U.S. and far up his private desert gulch to a place where he could hear only silence, the diamond of wisdom in his mind. The Southern Pacific's freight trains carried him to San Francisco, and late one afternoon he hiked past 348 Montford St. in Mill Valley, where Locke McCorckle and his family lived, and up the hill to Gary's humble hut, "Marin-An."

The McCorckles were organic refugees from American consumerism. Locke was a bearded, part-time carpenter whose only significant possessions were a guitar and his Hi-Fi set, and he and his family thrived on vegetable soups, home-made bread, and self-created entertainments. Some years later Locke would write a beautiful meditation on sex called "How to Make Love," and the atmosphere on Montford Avenue was hospitably creative.

Gary's cabin was cozy with burlap wallpaper, wildflowers in clay jars, tatami mats, Chinese prints and maps on the wall. Jack had some supper cooked when Gary came in from work, and after three months of good ole boys, it was nice to be with a non-Christian again. Their life on the hill was insulated from the conventional world, and though they listened to jazz at McCorckle's and entertained visitors, they had no newspapers, magazines, or TV. They chopped wood, talked of masters and koans, Kasyapa's flower sermon and Coyote the Indian god, and meditated, though Jack mostly ambled and dreamed while Gary was more rigorous. Four different writing projects absorbed most of Jack's energy.

Two--the "Duluoz Legend" and a film script called "The Book"--were short lived. The "Legend" was an auto-biography incorporating past lives, and ancient religiosity was at the center of "The Book." Its chief character was a Bodhisattva called "The Attainer," whose family had names like "Rock Silence, "Dawn Bird," and "Star Pity," served by merchants, servants, slaves, courtesans and scavengers inhabiting an enormous city on a North Atlantis river long, long ago. Jack's major--and later published--pieces were a meditation called "The Scripture of the Golden Eternity" and a poem called "Lucien Midnight" until Lucien objected, then "Old Angel Midnight."

In "Old Angel Midnight" (OAM) Jack tried to catch the

sound of all tongues, the sound of the universe as it floated into his window late at night, and for the first time he permitted himself absolute freedom as he wrote. The poem was incredibly long and devoid of meaning in the common sense, a raving argument between Jack and God in a universe of hurricane winds that swept his words around like confetti, so that they shifted before a reader could get them off the page. St. Benedict conversed with Danny and the Juniors, while Carolyn and Burroughs made love in the midst of Buddhist lore. In fact, Jack's trance was so deep that much of "OAM" was written in an illegible scribble most unlike his usual neat printing.

The last piece Jack wrote that spring, "The Scripture of the Golden Eternity," required encouragement. "All right, Kerouac," announced Gary, "it's about time for you to write a Sutra." The "Scripture" was a development of the Diamond Sutra, substituting the phrase "Golden Eternity" for "emptiness." "I was smelling flowers in the yard," Jack wrote, "and when I stood up I took a deep breath and the blood all rushed to my brain and I woke up dead on my back in the grass." He was unconscious for a minute, a neighbor said. "During that timeless moment of unconsciousness I saw the Golden Eternity . . . the rapturous ring of silence abiding perfectly."

> Did I create the sky? Yes, for if it was
> Anything other than a conception in my mind
> I wouldn't have said "sky"--that is why I am the
> Golden Eternity. There are but two of us here,
> reader and writer but one . . .

Because it was scripture, Jack said, he wouldn't allow himself to be spontaneous, and rewrote it.[11]

Montford Avenue was not entirely a monastery. As Gary's May 15th departure to Japan drew near, the parties intensified, developing into saturnalian open-air picnics that Jack thought were the D. H. Lawrence sexual revolution in action. Still chaste, he cooked or played with the McCorkle kids or sat talking in a corner, his eyes averted from the occasional naked lady who passed by. The last party, a three day blowout, starred the naked trio of angels Allen, Peter, and Gary, John Montgomery reading MAD magazine, Kenneth Rexroth lecturing on poetry and Neal on Cayce. Allen was a joy to see. He was luxuriating in "Howl's" imminent publication and letters of congratulation from Mark Van Doren and William Carlos Williams, having already planned to send copies to Pound, Faulkner, and T. S. Eliot, among others. Leavened by a fertile pinch of success, Allen no longer seemed evil to Jack, who was in fact beginning to suspect that his younger brother was a saint.

After three days of celebration, Jack and Gary quietly deserted the sleeping orgiasts to hike over Mount Tamalpais--Jack's first time there since 1947--arguing about Christianity all the while. Jack tried to be ecumenical, and thought Jesus was Maitreya, the Buddha who was to come after Sakyamuni.

Tam was easier hiking than the High Sierras, and they sat at the Muir Amphitheatre bathed in the sweet odor of pine and wet logs while they discussed Gary's trip to Japan and Jack's to Desolation Mountain. After enjoying a simple meal of rice and mushrooms and pea soup, they slept high among the spirits, swam at Stinson Beach, and came home. Gary presented Jack with a Hershey Bar, and in return Jack gave him a slip of paper on which he'd printed "MAY YOU USE THE DIAMONDCUTTER OF MERCY." After a final hug on the docks, they said goodbye. Though they had known each other only a few months, Jack's love for Gary was profound, and he missed him brutally over the coming years.

There was nothing for Jack to do but get drunk, and the night Gary left he met a prime drinking companion, a poet and editor named Robert Creeley. Dark, restless, and lonely, Creeley had separated from his wife and wandered to San Francisco to visit Ed Dorn, his old student from Black Mountain College. In something more like karma than coincidence, Dorn's working partner at the Greyhound Bus Terminal baggage room was Allen Ginsberg, and in a moment that was portentious for the future publication of the San Francisco poetry, Creeley and Allen soon met. The "Black Mountain poets" had a deep affinity for the Beats like Allen and Gregory and the San Franciscans like McClure, Snyder and Whalen--they too, as one critic noted, searched "for the personal voice, for the immediate impulse and its energy, for

the recognition of (even surrender to) process, to the elements of randomness, whimsy, play." Though it had a faculty that included the finest avant garde artists in America--John Cage, Merce Cunningham, William deKooning, Buckminster Fuller--Black Mountain was mired in financial poverty, and chose Creeley to edit a magazine that would advertise it to the world. The Black Mountain Review had already distinguished itself with Charles Olson, Kenneth Rexroth, and Paul Goodman when Creeley came to San Francisco to gather material for the seventh issue. He chose Allen as contributing editor and the issue became a Beat-San Franciscan showcase, publishing Allen's poem "America," Jack's "October in the Railroad Earth," sections from Burroughs' "Naked Lunch" and poems by Whalen, McClure and Snyder.

The night that Gary left Creeley became extraordinarily drunk, smashed enough to tangle with Trent, the bouncer at the Cellar Bar. Jack helped him to a friend's home in South San Francisco, then walked home fifteen miles across the Golden Gate Bridge to Mill Valley. In the course of the evening's excitement, Creeley also acquired an arrest for vagrancy, and Jack invited him and his lady love Martha to cool off at the Montford Avenue cottage for a while before he left for his lookout job on Desolation Mountain. Martha's last name was Rexroth, and her estrangement from her critic husband sowed the seeds of literary war. Rexroth chose to blame his marital woes on the carpetbagging New Yorkers, and

his personal sentiments later invaded his professional life.

After hitching from San Francisco to the ranger station at Marblemount, Washington--itself thirty-five miles from the nearest significant town and one hundred miles from Seattle--Jack climbed into a boat on Ross Lake for a substantial ride before two rangers packed in his supplies by horseback six steep miles to the mountain top. Desolation Mountain was in deep wilderness, as isolated as any part of the continental United States, and as Jack hitched up the coast to his job he thought that when "I'm alone I will come face to face with God or that light and find out once and for all what is the meaning of all this existence and suffering and going to and fro . . ."

In two months on the mountain top he met the bear of solitude, which was, of course, his own soul; the bear and the personality could not both survive such a test. Jack only went up on the mountain once.

Shrouded in fog and filthy from the previous tenant, his "little shadowy peaked shack" depressed him when he arrived on July 5th, but with the cabin cleaned and the fog gone two days later, its setting was so magnificent that he relaxed into a routine, reading Shakespeare and ancient cowboy pulp magazines, singing Sinatra songs out over the cliffs, the gnarled Zen trees, and the lake a mile below.

Generally he was silent and prayerful. Although he listened to his colleagues banter with each other on the short wave radio, he rarely joined in the dialogue. On his knees he asked "What is the meaning of the void?" of the "mad raging sunsets pouring in sea foams of cloud through unimaginable crags," of the deer that ate his leftover potatoes, of all the aspects of the Dharma.

Boredom set in, and he pictured his return to the city in total detail, played card baseball games with absolute versimilitude, thought of Memere and how old she was getting, prayed to Avalokitesvara. On August 7th, exquisitely lonely after thirty-three days of perfect solitude, he wallowed in horrible nightmares of betraying Memere, worry, self-hatred and grief intermixed. The next day he went a little berserk and killed a mouse--no trivial thing for his Buddhist soul--and tried to kill another. His tension stretched, grew thin, thinner, snapped: "Just <u>be</u>," he told himself, "Just <u>flow</u>," <u>pass through</u> all these dreams, and he relaxed a little.

"Wait, breathe, eat sleep, cook, wash, pace, watch, never any forest fires" was his summation.

He stared at Mount Hozomeen, whose naked face loomed in front of his little window like the void, and kept on keeping on. Sixty-two days into his struggle on the mountain, he opened a bag of peanut-raisin dessert, and the smell triggered memories of Gary, who'd given him the pouch, and Gary's "rucksack revolution." Desolation Mountain's solitude

had been too much for a sociable urban man like Jack, too stiff a test for almost anyone. Now he wanted fat luscious Mexican flesh whores calling for agua caliente (hot water), chocolate bars, furry rugs and comfort. Around him was only silence, rock, the void, and himself.

At last the fall rains made his vigil unnecessary, and he hiked down the mountain, rode the boat back to Marblemount, ate some ice cream, grew nearly sick from his childhood smell of printer's ink on a fresh newspaper, and set off to hitch back to civilization, down the highway to Seattle.

Even as he went down the road, American was changing; while he'd been in Marblemount, President Eisenhower had signed the Federal Highway Act of 1956, which would transform his two-lane beat roads into the four lane cross country interstate tunnels of the 1960s.[12] Controlled access roads were appropriate symbols for a giant concrete Moloch that was stealing the nation away from Jack faster than he could visit it, love it, and encompass it with his vision.

As the rich plenitude of American life narrowed into a rote social lockstep, Jack's vision of his own life dimmed, its colors fading from lack of hope. Still unpublished, Jack grew increasingly worried about an aging and more dependent Memere, and about his religious awakening, which seemed unable to cope with either solitude or alcohol.

He wavered, hanging in the balance.

CHAPTER XII

THE ANGEL TRAVELS

Don't look back. Somebody might be
gaining on you.
Satchel Paige

Seattle was a melange of dreary skid row shops and totem poles and a bar with the Friday night TV fights, where Carmen Basilio was hammering Johnny Saxton's face into the canvas. Jack bought The Sporting News and learned that the Milwaukee Braves and the Yankees would play in the World Series and that Mickey Mantle was hitting homeruns near Babe Ruth's pace. The September 17, 1956 issue of Time informed him that there had been desegregation riots in Clinton, Tennessee and political violence in Algeria, Cyprus and Egypt. In contrast, the Republican Party had just renominated Eisenhower and Nixon in harmonious peace, and though Jack wasn't registered to vote, he told a flabbergasted poet friend later that he would have cast his ballot for Papa Ike, because his opponent was "so elegant so snide so proud--"

As his first evening in "civilization" grew late, Jack bought some Italian Swiss Colony Port, put it in his bhikku canteen, and went off to indulge himself in lush fantasy at a burlesque theater, one of many men with hats in their laps; he was only thirty-four, but when he ogled a waitress in a Chinese restaurant afterwards he thought he was too much a bum, too lost and scabrous ever to be attractive again.

The rugged hike off the mountain had damaged his feet, and he took a bus rather than hitch to San Francisco, where he arrived on a Sunday afternoon in mid-September, gliding over the Bay Bridge to the downtown bus terminal. Very shortly thereafter Jack was to conclude that his "vision of the freedom of eternity" was "of little use in cities and warring societies." He had passed from the lonely quiet of a mountain top into a gangbanging frenzy of rivalries, the creative friendship he had left in June contaminated by envy. Success in the form of a photographer from Mademoiselle magazine was in the air, and its scent was poisonous. Jack wanted to shout that everyone was an "Angel!", but that didn't help.

At first his stay in San Francisco was just traditional city kicks; he got a hotel room and frantically rushed to the Cellar for the Sunday afternoon jam session, then to The Place for beer, then back to the heart beat jazz, feeding dimes into pay phones to try and catch Allen and get some action started. The next day he located Neal and snatched up Allen on the way; they found Cassady in his conductor's blue pants and vest, starched white shirt, and trainman's hat. "Jackson me boyyy," drawled Neal in greeting, and they set off for Mill Valley with the newly arrived Gregory Corso to pick up some of Jack's manuscripts. For no apparent reason, Corso and Cassady did not get on well, and their bad feelings colored the philosophical contest they carried on between

Cassadian auras and Corso's Shelley.

Allen and his lover Peter Orlovsky, who reminded Jack of a lunatic cousin from old Lowell, came over to Gregory's later in the day, and in between raving about love!, orgies, nakedness, and love!, they began to fondle Corso's girlfriend, which aggravated him greatly. Serene, Jack tried to calm everyone by reading his paraphrase of the Diamond Sutra, and diplomatically managed to include Gregory when Neal made plans to go to Golden Gate Fields racetrack the next day. Race day was wild, from the moment Jack awoke at Peter and Allen's apartment to greet a young lady named "Penny" who'd come to visit. Penny didn't think Jack was quite so decrepit as he imagined, and Jack's year-long Buddhist chastity melted like cotton candy at the touch of her lips. Neal bounced in a moment later with some grass and began to advise Peter's silent younger brother Lafcadio on astral bodies. Jack thought his spiel was merely "Words!", but he continued to smoke his joint. Then Cassady led them off to the track, where the goddess of luck blessed them with a grand day; Gregory picked mystically and came home even, Neal won playing his mad system, and Jack got peacefully drunk.

Two days later the poets posed for the Mademoiselle pictures. In the flash of the strobe lights Jack envisioned them as a "Million Dollar Outfield"; Allen was the "serious Lou Gehrig," Gregory the graceful Dimaggio, and Phil Whalen

the "pillar of strength" catcher. Jack caught his painful blend of artistic certitude and private self loathing in his own archetype; he was the gifted but unloveable, murderously intense Ty Cobb. Kerouac's was a strikingly beautiful portrait. Tanned and healthily lean from the mountains, his hair slightly tousled because Gregory wouldn't allow him to comb it, a crucifix Gregory had given him at his throat, Jack was Lochinvar, James Dean, and Merlin all in one. But it wasn't a true team photo session. Duncan and McClure had their pictures taken at a different time, and Rexroth was still growling imprecations about carpetbagging New Yorkers.

Despite the publicity, Jack had hardly any reason to be happy with his career. He would publish nothing in 1956, and he still had no contract for "On the Road," although he'd threatened to withdraw it if Viking didn't sign with him. Jack's frustration had been so bitter the previous winter that he had accused Allen of plagiarism in "Howl," and although they had tried to resolve their differences, their conversations were often stilted and uncomfortable. The miasma of jealousy had driven Allen frantic, and he kept yelling, "Hand in <u>hand</u> it's got to be!" McClure saw it differently. To him, Allen the organizer was pushing a "homoerotic," "comrades and lovers," "join or die" campaign on the poets, and such neopolitical abstractions had no appeal for Mike. Besides, Corso kept taunting, "You hate me, McClure."

He would reply, "I don't hate you, who says I hate you?" The daisy chain of squabbling went around and around. Corso's provocations generated more smoke than light, and McClure dismissed the whole argument with the comment, "None of you know anything of language--with the exception of Jack."[1]

Now that a publicized scene had emerged, too many egos were pushing and shoving for the limelight; a second major reading in May included Robert Creeley, and City Lights Bookstore had become a literary Lourdes filled with book-seeking dharma bums. On September 2, 1956, the New York Times Book Review heralded it all with a piece by critic Richard Eberhart entitled "West Coast Rhythms." Eberhart had attended the May reading, which had its own postcard invitation: "Celebrated Good Time Poetry Night. Either you go home bugged or completely enlightened. Allen Ginsberg blowing hot; Snyder blowing cool; Phil Whalen puffing the laconic tuba . . . One and only final appearance of this apocalypse." Eberhart was an older and accepted poet, but he wrote in a positive, annunciatory--if tentative--fashion that the Bay Area poets had "a young will to kick down the doors of older consciousness and established practice in favor of what they think is vital and new." Unsure of its significance but gratified to be present at the birth of an aesthetic revolution, Eberhart concluded: "Poetry here has become a tangible social force, moving and unifying the auditors, releasing the energy of the audience through spoken,

even shouted verse, in a way at present unique to this region." The word had gone forth from the New York Times.

In October City Lights Press published Howl, dedicated among others to Jack, "New Buddha of American Prose," and with an introduction by William Carlos Williams: "Hold back the edges of your gowns, ladies, we are going through hell." The graphic certitude of publication fulfilled Allen and also added to his apprehensions about fame and the San Francisco scene, and he made plans to tour Europe with Jack and visit Burroughs in Tangiers. Ginsberg had inherited some money, and though the circumstances were painful, he was free to travel. The money was his because on June 9, 1956, he received the following telegram: "NAOMI GINSBERG DIED SUDDENLY SATURDAY AFTERNOON . . ." Later his brother Eugene wrote and described her pitiable funeral, where the functionary who was to speak didn't know her name, asked, and couldn't get it right; since there were not enough men present to constitute a minyan (the quorum of ten necessary for formal prayer), there was no Jewish prayer for the dead. No one said Kaddish for Naomi Ginsberg.

Before they left San Francisco, Jack and Allen's increasing notoriety brought them some enjoyable times as well. Ruth Witt-Diamont, Director of the San Francisco State University Poetry Center, gave a dinner for Randall Jarrell, the Library of Congress poetry consultant, and New Yorker poetry critic Louise Bogan. To make an interesting evening,

she also invited Allen, Gregory, Jack and Phil. It was a relaxed, pleasant evening, even after Jack's faux pas.

Jack: "I ride freight trains."

Gregory: "So what!"

Jack: "But it's a first-class freight train!"

In the amused uproar around the table, Jack mentally shrugged and determined to be the Bodhisattva who enlightened through laughter, rather than try to explain that the California Midnight Zipper was indeed a first class train. The stately and charming Bogan picked up the conversation again by asking the poets if they believed in God. "Every once in a while I feel I have to have a white talk with God, myself," she said. She was shocked when Allen and Phil said no. Jack, though, said yes. After dinner they went to hear Jarrell read, but Jack wanted no part of Jarrell's polished craft, which seemed to him an "imitation of the best poetry hitherto written."

Before he left to find the nearest bar, he spoke with Philip Lamantia, who was worth the pause. Dancing around the room like Valentino, he had evolved from the decadent aesthete who had years before given Jack and Neal pills for what he called "the <u>final</u> kick"--no fools, Kerouac and Cassady refused to take them--to a contemplative about to go on retreat in a Trappist monastery. They argued briefly about religion; Jack began with Buddha under the tree, but Lamantia protested, "But Ja-a-a-ck, that's not outside the

natural order."

Later there was still another party, this time a dull affair in an elegant mansion where the most interesting guest was Peter's brother Lafcadio, who spent the evening staring into a mirror. The "gang" exited the mansion singing rowdy harmony, only to confront the police. Jack advised them to "avoid the authorities," and they passed quietly on, as Jack recalled it, "walking talking poetry in the streets, walking talking God in the streets. (and at one point a strange gang of hoodlums got mad and said 'what right does he have to wear that [Jack's crucifix]?' And my own gang of musicians and poets told them to cool it)--"[2]

Wrung out by city life, Jack left Allen to catch up with him in Mexico City and rode down to Los Gatos with Neal and Gregory, arriving late at night to sleep in the yard and be awakened by the children's chorus of Cathy, Jamie, and John. Corso was bored and said it was "bullshit" when Neal played his usual TV roulette, spinning continuously between "Queen for a Day" and "Oral Roberts," bowing his head in prayer for Oral's cripples and the game show's sad contestants. But this was a family visit, especially for the children, and when Jack was about to leave he took them on a final long walk in the local orchards, weaving a fairy tale of kings and monkeys. He hugged "Maw" Carolyn goodbye, and got into Neal's battered jalopy. Worried because Jack was drunk, Neal was full of "instructions and care" as he drove

to the station. Jack managed not to get too tripped up in the unnecessary details of how to jump a train, swung onto the Zipper and was gone for the peaceful solitude of Mexico City.

The world was "growing narrower in its views about eccentricity every day," Jack thought, and he felt like a Rembrandt who painted until dawn as his subject-Burghers snoozed in bourgeois quiet. Hiking in the desert near Tucson, he found himself surrounded by police cars, their searchlight beams illuminating his jeans, workshirt and rucksack. The officers wanted to know where he was going, why he didn't sleep in a hotel. "I'm studying hobo," he said. Eventually they gave him up as a dimwit and turned him loose to sleep on his golden sands. Estranged as they were in standards of consumption, they could not comprehend how a man with money might prefer to sleep under the stars.

Mexico was a return to solitude, "to dream all day," as he later wrote, "and work out chapters in forgotten reveries that emerge years later in book form." Once again he had his marijuana, his rooftop adobe room with Garver downstairs for company, and his work, the completion of "Tristessa." Esperanza Villanueva had written him several times since he'd left her, and Jack had often pondered her ravaged beauty. He was aghast when they met; no beauty remained,

only the bruised remnants of a body and mind that had endured a river of morphine and goofballs beyond its capacity. She was so far gone that she nodded off and fell in the street, battering herself in the dirt. She lost control and attacked Garver, driving him in a tremble to sleep with Jack on the roof. Drooling with the same goofballs as Esperanza, Garver had a tendency to wet Jack's bed, and even when he controlled himself Jack had to practice Buddhist charity and empty his bedpan. Cherishing memories of Papa Leo, Jack ran errands to the store for his guest's magazines, candy, and cigarettes. The thought that he should have stayed in Mexico with Esperanza slashed at Jack's conscience like an angry black cat, and he silenced his guilt with a vicious combination of wine and tequila that left him ready one night, as he drunkenly boasted a decade later, to "nail her." She said, "Shhh the landlord will hear. Remember, I'm weak and sick." In one of the bizarre moments of Jack's life when his roles spun and crossed in mid-air, he whispered back, "I know, I've been writing how you're weak and sick." Soon he ran away from her.

Garver's lectures on Alexander the Great, Crete and Gilgamesh continued in the background, and with "Tristessa"--one of the "long sad tales about people in the legend of my life"--completed in mid-October, Jack lit another candle in his hut, brewed some cocoa, and began a manuscript called "Desolation Angels," the story of his summer on Desolation

Mountain and in San Francisco. "Desolation Angels" was no quicky transcription of his journal notes, nor was it stylistically like what he called the "ingrown toenail-packed mysticism" of "Tristessa." It had a more direct narrative sense than "Tristessa," but went far beyond travelogue as Jack's memory roved to Lowell, wartime Greenland, and Desolation.[3] Philosophically, "Desolation Angels" was all its title hinted, the tale of a desolate man, a pilgrim who had given up on Buddhism as on all systems. He prophesied that the final prayer would be, "I don't know, I don't care, and it doesn't matter." There was no further need to tell stories, of course, no need for anything, but life remained, "an aching mystery--" His writing was controlled and powerful, ranging from Mt. Hozomeen in the wilderness--"like a tiger sometimes with stripes"--to a goaty lust song for a Seattle stripper and a forelorn soliloquy for America. Above all Jack wrote of angels of desolation, of death . . . "And I will die, and you will die, and we will all die, and even the stars will fade out one after another in time."

Jack's month in Mexico City before his friends joined him stretched out in gloom. Two weeks late after stopping to visit a friend, Allen, Peter, Lafcadio and Gregory arrived in Mexico City to find Jack sullen and morose. They gathered with Garver, who immediately flashed his catlike smile and gave Allen a shot of morphine. As was his custom, Peter began to scrub the floors and woodwork, while Lafcadio,

sinking near catatonia, slumped inscrutably into a corner. Gregory had been writing brilliantly at the time--Ferlinghetti would soon publish him--and was full of energy, jumping about, as Jack described it, to "dramatize the way he felt." Cheerfully grandiose, he identified with Garver's ramble about Alexander the Great as a future poet-conqueror himself. Jack was still Buddhist enough for the talk of past heroics to trigger mental images of the trail of corpses left in Alexander's wake.

Jack was frightened when the street boys whistled at them, until Allen explained that their whistles were not a mocking commentary on Peter and Allen, but excited admiration. Ginsberg wanted to see the majestic new University of Mexico campus, and in an archetype of Jack's mood those days, Kerouac phlegmatically went along only to see what would happen next. Later they visited the Pyramids of Tetotihuacan, Peter and Allen and Jack in the lead as Gregory mused off to the side and Lafcadio clanked along machine-like behind them. Smoking pot at the top of the pyramid, they blinked at the sun and tried to comprehend the minds of the ancient Aztec priests whose shades drifted about them. Gory blood sacrifice seemed so very strange in such a beautiful place, and when they spent an hour examining a giant ant colony below, they took great care not to crush any of the insects.

Oregano, the avenue of whores that Jack dubbed the "street of nausea," was another of their haunts. Braving the

stench of fried sausage, brick, muddy garbage and banana peels, they went to the Club Bombay, its tawdry Mariachi singers reeking of sweat and costumed in seedy despair. Peter and Jack visited the brothel in back and Jack chose a fourteen year old child--"nobody cares," he told himself--while Peter returned six times and acquired a painful case of gonorrhea. Gregory avoided the orgy with a massive spell of depression that brought him home early. Revolted by the sham Americanized Pepsi-taco culture of the slums, Corso thought Mexico City was "poor, sick, and nowhere." After five days of sluicing late November rain, he flew to Washington; having been charmed by him and his poetry at Ruth Witt-Diamont's dinner, Randall Jarrell and his wife were going to sponsor him.

After Gregory left, Jack and Allen visited the famous floating gardens of Xochimilco. Allen was gleeful, anticipating a triumphant return to New York and then a long sojourn in Europe with Jack. Dazed by drugs and beauty, utterly devoid of ideas about his future, Jack flopped down in the boat, lugubriously deaf to Allen's energetic vision of their possibilities. Though he was pleased that the newly begun Evergreen Review wanted to purchase "The Subterraneans" at a penny a word, Jack was worried about editorial meddling with his prose and still had no formal word from Viking about "Road." The continuing uncertainty ground him down and bled his energy away, until he felt like

a futile zombie.

Too, he was frightened by the political dimensions of Allen's poetry, although he'd enjoyed it when Allen had described how he'd squelched a heckler in a reading in Los Angeles on the way to Mexico. The man querulously asked Allen what his poetry meant, and demurred at the answer "Nakedness," demanding to know "What's that?" Allen made his point directly, taking off his clothes and continuing to read. But Jack was done in, wholly unable to cope with any sort of conflict, political or otherwise. All his roads had turned dull and blank, merging in the empty gray horizon visible to his mind's eye.

Wriggling in their boat as once he had squirmed on Times Square cafeteria seats, Allen urged him to come to New York: "It's time for you to make it! After all!" Jack carped and moaned, and Allen raised his finger and berated him. "Where's your old Dostoyevsky curiosity?" Allen wondered. "You've become so whiny! You're coming on like an old sick junky sitting in a room in nowhere." His eyes flashing with his labor organizer-Blakean glitter, Allen shouted, "It's time for the poets to influence American Civilization!"

Jack saw an opening, and laughed, "Allen, if you'd really seen a vision of eternity, you wouldn't care about influencing American Civilization."

Delighted with a response at last, Ginsberg slammed

home his riposte, and teased Jack's curiosity enough for him to join the pilgrimage to New York, Tangiers and Europe. "I have a Blakean message for the Iron Hound of America," Allen whispered. "How can the East have any respect for a country that has no prophetic Poets?"

Their journey to New York was grueling, with six men (Jack, Allen, Peter, Lafcadio, two others) and their baggage crammed into a too small car. Norman, the car's gangster owner, was not happy about his "fag poet" passengers, but a little marijuana lubricated him, and then Allen surprised him by joining in on harmony as he sang opera. The ride was painfully dull but peaceful.[4] Back in Greenwich Village, they emerged from the car into a bleak early December morning, coughing and spitting from too many cigarettes as they shivered in the chill. Jack was gaunt at 155 pounds, his lowest weight in years. A woman friend of Allen's put them up and even shared her bed with Jack, but after a week he moved to Lucien's, where he watched old Clark Gable films--Gregory had said in Mexico that he had Gable's hands--and hid from the present by reading Mallarmé, Proust, and Courbiere in the original.

It was well that Jack was surrounded by friends when he finally heard from Viking Press; he might have exploded without compatriots to share his profane joy. In mid-December

1956, almost six years after composition, "On the Road" was officially accepted by Viking for publication the following September. Jack's long vigil was over. At that, it was perhaps too late for festivities. The rites of initiation into Madison Avenue had demanded too much of Jack, had stripped him of every resource but his work itself. For the moment, he was delirious with joy. He raced about town getting libel clearances signed, caught Cecil Taylor at the Five-Spot Cafe, enjoyed an orgy with a budding poet and admirer of Allen's named Diane DiPrima, and went to the Russian Tea Room to meet Salvador Dali, who said that he was more beautiful than Marlon Brando.

On his way to Orlando, Florida, to join Memere and Nin for Christmas in their new home, he stopped in Washington to see Corso. Caged in Randall Jarrell's dignified home, Gregory reminded Jack of a prize Pekinese, a tiny blackhaired bundle of pethood, stroked, spoiled and patronized. Jack still liked Gary Snyder's idea of eccentric dharma bum poets, and out of principle he liberated some of Jarrell's Jack Daniels, smoked marijuana in the basement, and started giant arguments over spontaneity in poetry with the Library of Congress' poetry consultant, asking, "How can you confess your crafty soul in craft?" It had been Gregory's sheer outrageousness that had given him meaning in Jack's eyes, and his current discretion--no drugs, no swearing--was pitiful. Corso wouldn't be a "good boy" for long, but his

current phase made Jack foresee something dreary in literary success. As he waited for the bus to Florida later, Jack became lacrimosely drunk, not on Tokay but on the drink of prosperity, his new delight, Jack Daniels whiskey.

In Orlando, Memere was less ambivalent about her son's achievement. She was sixty-one now and happily retired, and enjoyed having Jack to fix her martinis with the St. Patrick's Cathedral Midnight Mass, or serving him a fine fat turkey for New Year's 1957. Even more, Gabrielle Levesque Kerouac relished her son's New Year's pledge to her; "On the Road's" proceeds would buy her a house of her own, in repayment for all the years she'd supported him.[5]

Returning to New York early in January to complete his business with Viking, Jack plunged into an intense cauldron of attention. He began to date a young woman named Joyce Glassman, an editorial assistant who resembled his second wife Joan Haverty in her mannered upper-middle classness. Lucien called Joyce "Ecstasy Pie," and her affair with Jack would endure for an erratic year and a half. Allen led the poets on a pilgrimage to Rutherford, New Jersey, to meet his spiritual father, William Carlos Williams. Dr. Williams encouraged Jack's writing, and then Jack spent most of a delightful afternoon with Mrs. Williams, ruminating about his upcoming trip to see Burroughs while she reminisced about her young womanhood in Europe. The old Doctor had advice for the poets, and they needed to listen: "Lotsa

bastards out there," he warned them.

They rushed back to Paterson and Louis Ginsberg's sun room, where they spent a day gloating as they typed up poems and wrote letters to the first of what became a flood of mimeographed poetry magazines, Combustion of Toronto. A united poetry front had functioned, if only briefly. As they returned to New York City, Jack refused when Gregory asked him to pay his bus fare. Jerking up and down on his seat in a spasm of anger at Jack's miserliness, Gregory yelped, "All you do is hide money in your beauty. It makes you ugly! You'll die with money in your hand and wonder why the angels won't lift you up." Jack burst into tears; far from being wealthy, he'd sent his "Road" advance to Memere, and had borrowed his boat fare to Tangiers from Allen.

In an imposing flurry of appointments, Jack signed his "On the Road" contract with Viking, had his picture taken (hair combed) by Life, and signed a contract with Grove Press to publish "The Subterraneans" in the May Evergreen Review. He, Peter, and Allen enjoyed the weekend of January 19th at John Holmes' place in Old Saybrook, Connecticut, joyously playing football in knee deep snow and ice skating on the frozen cove. Jack impressed Holmes as lean, sober and meticulous, still very much affected by Buddhism, somewhat withdrawn but happy. John caught up with the Kerouac legend by reading "Desolation Angels" and "Tristessa," and their long cheery talks before the

fireplace in Holmes' fine New England home renewed their nearly decade-long friendship.

As Jack discoursed before the fire, the signs of his oncoming fame began to accumulate, like the first ominous clicks on a Geiger counter that registers the approach of a giant nuclear cloud. Mademoiselle's February issue hit the newstands with Michael Grieg's "The Lively Arts in San Francisco" surrounded by advertisements for Peck & Peck blouses, Neet hair removing cream, Bonnie Bell pimple lotion, Jantzen bras, Mamselle shoes, and advice on "How to be More Perfect." The text was scant, but the pictures--a stunningly handsome Jack, bearded Allen, McClure, and Ferlinghetti at City Lights--attracted immediate attention. One swift reaction came from Jack's first wife Edie Parker. Having somehow managed to track him down in New York, she called Jack late one night and volunteered to pay her own fare if he would include her on his European "tour." British publishers were negotiating for "On the Road," and then Jack had dinner with a Warner Brothers Films story editor.

The media monster stirred and sent out a tentacle to interview Jack, Allen and Gregory, a Village Voice reporter named Dan Balaban. Though Norman Mailer had contributed an ostentatiously hip column to it only the year before, the Voice was interested in high rather than bohemian culture, and in middle class Village politics; one of its

most popular features was a sports car column. Balaban's article, "Three 'Witless Madcaps' Come Home to Roost," focused on the trio's most exotic one-liners--"Don't shoot the wart hog" was Gregory's contribution--and emphasized the exploitative cuteness of its title when it buried Allen's point that "we want everyone to know that we had to leave the Village to find fulfillment and recognition." Jack thought New York was "too big, too multiple, too jaded." He continued, "We're saints and Villagers and we're beautiful. And we went to San Francisco and did beauty there." Deadly serious and without a hope of being understood, Jack admonished Voice readers to "Pity dogs and forgive men."[6]

Jack's girlfriend Joyce Glassman, Lucien, his wife and two children sent Jack off with an exhilarating bon voyage party in honor of his first trip as a ship passenger, and he sailed for Tangiers in February on the S. S. Slovenia, with Allen and Peter to follow as soon as they cleaned up some legal business. Feeling "light and gay," Jack enjoyed his first days aboard ship. He savored his lone occupation of a double stateroom and indulged in fancies about the communist Yugoslavian crew and his red white and blue self, nearly convincing himself that the only other passenger, a Russian woman, was a spy.

Halfway out a monstrous storm washed over them like

Prospero's own tempest, and his feeble notions of politics and even his Buddhism vanished. Later he'd agree with the Lankavantara Sutra that "There's nothing but Mind," but when the green seas began to break over the bow, all his faith in the void evaporated as he sagged looseboweled in panic over the toilet. He told Holmes later that he'd seen a glow of light on the dark holocaust of the ocean, a godly affirmation of some sort, but his stormy gloom was so deep that when he read a history book over the next few days, all it communicated was "women raped, children belted, animals slaughtered, scalpings . . . gas ovens, barbed wire, atom bombs, television murders, Bolivian starvation . . . bureaucrats, insult, rage, horror, terrified nightmares, secret death of hangovers, cancer, ulcers, strangulation."

At last the tan smudge on the horizon filled and came into focus as Africa, and Jack went ashore to meet a new Bill. After a year of doing almost nothing except shoot junk and stare at his big toe, Bill had fled to London in 1956 for a course of treatment that involved apomorphine, morphine boiled in hydrochloric acid. The ghostly junky had partly transmuted into a "tanned, muscular and vigorous" man with enough energy to play tourist guide, delighting Jack with Tangiers' exotic architecture, veiled women, and cafes filled with men smoking hashish and sipping mint tea. Below the city's mysterious frenzy of men, the brilliant blue Straits of Gibralter were flecked with bright-sailed

fishing boats. Jack took a room on Burroughs' roof, where he could entertain an occasional veiled prostitute while Bill dallied below with boys and opium.

Though he had at last controlled his morphine habit, Burroughs was no dewy repentant lamb, but a scintillatingly mad genius who reminded Jack of Dr. Mabuse and Robert Louis Stevenson's Mr. Hyde. "I'm just a hidden agent from another planet," Burroughs told Jack one day as they walked above the city, "and the trouble is, I don't know why they sent me, I've forgotten the God damn message dearies." Bound in sweet compassion, Jack interpreted Bill's comment agreeably. "I'm a messenger from heaven too," he said. When Jack gushed over the precious sight of a shepherd carrying a new born lamb, Bill sniffed and defined the chasm between them by cackling, "Oh well, the little pricks are always rushing around carrying lambs."

Burroughs' persona as a sorceror had developed extraordinarily in the twilight of his drug life. He was, he said, "trying to arrive at some absolutely direct transmission of fact on all levels," and had adopted Jack's sketch method to reproduce his own visions. The result was a manuscript Jack thought so apocalyptically true that when its original title "Word Hoard" proved already taken, he dubbed it "The Naked Lunch." The book was a record of agony, a twisting of the life source in all ways, especially the sexual.

At the age of forty-three, Burroughs was attempting to exorcise a lifetime of homosexuality, which he had come to regard as "a horrible sickness." At the same time, he begged for any news Jack could provide about Allen or Peter, then dissolved into tears. All of the pain came out in "Naked Lunch," about which Bill told Jack, "I am shitting out my educated Middlewest background for once and for all. It's a matter of catharsis where I say the most horrible thing I can think of--realize that, the most horrible dirty slimy niggardliest posture possible."

Jack began to type up the manuscript and thought it was wonderful, superceding Genet, deSade, and Aleister Crowley, and simultaneously revolting, a progression of ghastly scenes based on the fact that men have erections and orgasms when hanged. With the slime of an intergalactic cesspool on his mind, Jack began to have terrifying dreams of endless bolognas coming out of his mouth, materialized out of his intestines the way a magician might produce a scarf. Majoun (hasish and honey candy) had something to do with his nightmares, as well as his visits to the sleaziest dive in Tangiers, the Dancing Boy Bar, and the amphetamines and barbituates which were freely available at the corner drugstore. Then he received the proofs of "The Subterraneans" from New York and went berserk, screeching in letters to Lord that editor Don Allen had castrated it with cuts. He felt raped, and Lord forced the substitution of "October in the

Railroad Earth" in Evergreen, while "The Subterraneans" would come out as a book a year later.

It was a narrow escape, and Jack was tense and preoccupied when Bill offered him some opium. Eating the magic little ball was like standing knee deep in water and clamping down with both hands on a ten thousand volt electric cable: His mind shook, crackled, snapped, he retched and puked and vomited some more, then stared at the ceiling for thirty-six hours while his eyes refused to close and his vision melted and swirled out of control. Boiling up out of his poor mind came the sorrowful thought in the midst of dreamy chaos that all he wanted was his childhood back, his Wheaties and sunshine and health. And that was far away and long, long ago.

When Peter and Allen landed in Tangiers, Jack was sitting on his rooftop patio reading the American critic Van Wyck Brooks. He was peaceably high on hashish but not at all ready for the strain between the ex-lovers Allen and Bill. When Allen and Peter called to him from the street, he took them exploring Tangiers, and bought prostitutes for himself and Peter. Out one day with Allen, they met a master checker player named Mohammed Mayé. Another natural man, Mayé reminded them of Neal, down to his affection for marijuana, which he sold to them at the rate of twenty joints for five cents American.

Maddened by the opium, his publishing anxieties and

his eternal restlessness, Jack could not remain in Tangiers. Only two weeks after Allen and Peter arrived, he was off again in early April, riding a rotten fourth class ferry to Marseilles.[7] American diplomats hounded him, "stiff officious squares with contempt even for their own Americans who happened not to wear neckties . . . an endless phony rejection in the name of 'democracy' of all that's of pith and moment of every land." Worse even than supercilious officialdom was the shallow fraud of the hipsters Jack encountered in Europe. Hipsters thought Bird wasn't disciplined enough, had no Dostoyevskian rage or joy or love or even curiosity, Jack saw, but a "postured, actually secretly rigid coolness that covers up the fact that the character is unable to convey anything of force or interest, a kind of sociological coolness." Yet cool hipsterism was becoming a fad, and most frightening to the shy drunken Bodhisattva, would "be attributed in part to my doing."

His childhood memories of Balzac and St. Teresa swimming in his brain, Jack delighted in France, especially holy Paris, where he walked for miles with a flask of cognac, particularly in the neighborhood of Montmartre and Sacre Coeur, the natural home for his rococo religious taste. He went to the Pantheon and had soup in a student restaurant, saw Van Gogh, Rembrandt, Rubens and

Breughel at the Louvre, but was "too fucking professionally morose" for Gregory Corso, with whom he bar crawled across the left bank. In London he saw his old Horace Mann buddy Seymour Wyse, hunted for Sherlock's 221B Baker Street, saw St. Paul's Choir perform "St. Matthew's Passion" on Good Friday and visited the British Museum to research his geneology in the Rivista Araldica. The crest of the Kerouacs was a stripe of gold on a blue shield, with three silver nails and the motto, "Aimer, Travailler, et Souffrir" (Love, Work and Suffer). Jack was troubled with the thought that the motto could well have been a synopsis of The Town and the City.[8]

His ship home, the Nieuw Amsterdam, was too elegant, and his jeans and flannel shirt stood out in the silk and crystal dining room. Mostly he read in his bunk, walked the upper decks at night, and tried to stuff in enough extra helpings at meals to justify the high fare. Kerouac was returning to an America that was a strange mix of complacent unity and underlying terror and corruption.

The economy was healthy and labor was at peace, but a flourishing scandal involving Dave Beck, Jimmy Hoffa, and the Teamsters Union threatened to embarrass the union movement. Life and the rest of the media featured articles about "Atomic Progress," but the Senate was investigating fallout, Strontium 90 levels, and the strange deaths of certain Nevada livestock, while Edward Teller urged the con-

struction of bomb shelters. Joseph McCarthy was dead and his obituaries had been gentle, but when a year later businessman Cyrus Eaton dared to criticize the FBI, the House Unamerican Activities Committee immediately subpoenaed him. The only public voice raised against the enormous military budget was that of the president of General Electric--the liberal Americans for Democratic Action were as enthusiastic about missiles as the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

IBM President Thomas Watson warned that June's DePauw University graduates away from being organization men, "as depersonalized as jellyfish wrapped in cellophane," and Brandeis President Abraham Sachar agonized to University of Massachusetts graduates over the "growing cult of yesmanship," wherein "security becomes a craven disguise for servility." Too late, the academy was catching on to the price of mass prosperity. All it needed to do was to read America's most popular book, soon to be the most popular piece of fiction in the history of the world: Peyton Place.

Grace Metalious' epic did so well because of its prurient sexuality--"Is it up, Rod?," said one "tramp." "Is it up good and hard?"--but for deeper reasons as well. In her labored mail-order-school style of writing, Metalious took well established social patterns from the southern mill-town and transplanted them to picturesque New England; mill owner Leslie Harrington and his rotten son Rodney, kindly Doc Swain, virtuous (but practical) editor Seth Buswell,

closet homosexual Norman Page, Lucas Cross the white trash drunk, Selena, his good, upwardly mobile daughter, and Alison McKenzie, the sensitive outsider. Metalious' puppets were designed to reassure her audience that such archetypes, such a notion of stability, still existed. She created an illusory tension by salting the characters with secrets, then concluded with her most brilliant sales-stroke, the meting out of strict Puritan justice to each.

No-good Rodney knocked up a girl but didn't have to get married, so he played grabass with another floozy and wound up plastered against the front end of a Mack truck at sixty miles an hour. Leslie Harrington was cruel and dictatorial, and lost his son. Lucas Cross raped his daughter Selena, and when he returned years later she smashed his skull and buried him; because she was good, Selena was exonerated at her trial. As soon as Constance McKenzie began to tell the truth, she got a perfect husband and eternal love.

Peyton Place's sexuality was a trivial lure that disguised the stunningly traditional virtue at its core. In reality, it was as pious as the nation's most popular entertainer, Lawrence Welk, whose two weekly TV shows had an audience of nearly fifty million people. Yet if the small cluster of citizens at the Six Gallery and their kin were in revolt against the literary establishment, American youth en masse had already dispatched Welk, Doris Day, and

watered down jazz. When Jack toyed briefly that May with the idea of calling his book "Rock and Roll Road," he may have been momentarily foggy in his taste for titles, but not in his sense of what appealed to America's youth. Jack loved Chuck Berry and then Elvis, and respected rock and roll as another black music form that emphasized vitality over slickness. Sadly, in a few years the best rock and rollers--Chuck Berry and Jerry Lee Lewis--were in jail, Elvis Presley was in the Army, Little Richard had quit for the church, and Buddy Holly, Richie Vallens, and the Big Bopper were dead. The first wave of the new music was all too brief.

While in Tangiers, Jack had conceived of another gloriously futile attempt to make Memere and himself happy; he decided to move her to Berkeley, so that he could live with her yet be around the scene, close to Neal, Phil Whalen, and later Allen. Still hoping for a refuge, Jack also planned to eventually build a Thoreau shack in Marin County north of San Francisco.[9] When the Nieuw Amsterdam docked in New York, he spent a little time with Joyce Glassman, sped to Orlando, packed up his manuscripts and Memere's "silk bloomers, rosaries, tin cans full of buttons, rolls of ribbon, needles, powder puffs, old berets, and boxes of cotton wads from old medicine bottles," and joined

her on a bus headed west. Suitably fortified with aspirins and Coca-Cola, Memere enjoyed eating oysters in New Orleans as she flirted with old men in the bars, and was moved at the sight of the crawling penitentes in a Juarez peasant church. When they arrived in mid-May, Gabrielle wasn't so sure about 1943 Berkeley Way, Berkeley, California. Earthquakes and fog made her nervous and she had no company but Jack, who was speeding on Tangerian Benzedrine and found it difficult to work on his poem "Old Angel Midnight" with her in the house all day. The Berkeley police slapped him with several jaywalking tickets, which exasperated him, but there were also serious troubles.

Edie Parker wasn't the only ex-wife who'd seen his name in the media; though she thought he was still in Tangiers, Joan Haverty had a warrant out for his arrest for non-support. As Jack had read in the sage Milarepa, "Keep low and poor and no litigation will arise." Phil Whalen was close to the Kerouacs, in part because Memere adored him, called him "Old Granpa" and made him welcome. Neal was hardly to be seen, and Jack's feelings were hurt. He'd come to California for a big two-family scene at last, and Cassady was "cold," Jack thought, and afraid of being chiseled on. Heavily preoccupied with a music recital, Carolyn did not visit immediately, and before she had a chance, the Kerouacs were gone.

Wearied by the problems of managing his money, half-listening when Memere shrewishly warned him that everyone

was out to rob him, sick of her nagging him every time he went into San Francisco to drink, his work completely blocked, Jack conceded after six weeks in their "final home" that he'd been a fool. Early in July he and Memere rode the bus back to Orlando and Nin's home, but just before he left, he had a strange epiphany.

Standing in the Berkeley Way apartment, Jack had just ripped open the carton that contained his advance copies of On the Road and had a precious, as yet unopened volume in his hand when the door flew open and in burst "Dean Moriarity," "Marylou," and "Al Dunkel" (Neal, Luanne and Ed Hinckle), a visitation from the past that collided in some insanely ghostly way with the artistic present. Jack grinned embarrassedly and handed the copy to Neal, but worried that Cassady had looked away "shifty-like" as they parted. Success had added a new lash to his inner scourge, the potentially awful consequences of using friends in his art. Actually, though he did not approve of his own life-style, Neal loved being the star of a book, and advertised all through San Francisco that he was "Dean Moriarity."[10]

Once he and Memere climbed off the bus in Orlando, Jack found a bungalow complete with citrus trees that Memere thought was "cute," and after a couple of weeks of Florida heat he lit out for Mexico City to write a public

relations article on the "Beat Generation." Badly frightened by an earthquake just after his arrival, he soon developed a massive fever that made him sweat so much he rotted out the lining of his sleeping bag. Underlaying that misery was his sad dejection that Garver was dead. Jack presumed that he'd run out of dope, and as foretold in "Mexico City Blues," had committed suicide by swallowing forty sodium amytal tablets. Somehow Jack managed to complete the publicity article, rereading Spengler as he likened the Beats to Tao, Dionysism, and Buddhism as an essentially religious movement that in the 20th century was rooted in the Gothic style as it strived to supplant the decadence of the technocracy.

Late in August he returned to Orlando and troubles. He was working on a book about Burroughs called "Secret Mullings About Bill" and planning for a "Visions of Gary," because Snyder was the only man since Cassady to engage him emotionally. But the local newspaper sent reporters to interview him and the neighbors stared when he tried to sunbathe or read in the yard. The autograph fiend was about to engulf him, and he was alone. Allen had knocked on hundreds of Madison Avenue doors as an agent and could cope, but he was enjoying himself in Spain and Italy, where he infuriated Memere by denouncing the Catholic Church as a "bunch of hard up, fig leaving, psychotic Politicians." Jack could not handle the publicity, and the deluge was

just beginning to build. There were two more major stories that summer--Howl and the Evergreen Review.[11]

Disgusted by the flaccid "poetasting" of 1950s America, Barney Rosset had begun Grove Press with yellow bound re-editions of Melville's The Confidence Man and Henry James' The Golden Bowl. A Grove editor named Don Allen then proposed the creation of the Evergreen Review, to be modeled on the French review N.R.F. as a forum to expose and evaluate new manuscripts. The overwhelmingly European first issue led with Sartre, Beckett, and Henri Michaux; an article on old time jazz drummer Baby Dodds was the only significant concession to Americana. Donald Allen had friends in the Bay Area who had alerted him to the San Francisco poetic earthquake, and when Allen, Gregory and Jack had passed through New York in January 1957, they'd helped him put together the second issue of the Review, an encyclopediac catalogue of "Beat" and San Franciscan writing that enraged the local academicians, who took to calling up Grove Press, as Donald put it, "to tell us it ain't literature."

The San Francisco Renaissance issue of the Review was instantly and astonishgly popular--its first printing was double the first issue's, and it was reprinted several times--and remarkably prescient as well, running nearly every San Francisco artist destined to endure. It opened with a letter from Rexroth, and included older poets William

Everson (Brother Antoninus), Josephine Miles, James Broughton, and Jack Spicer. Younger poets contributed Michael McClure's "Night Words," selections from Ferlinghetti's "A Coney Island of the Mind," Gary Snyder's "A Berry Feast," and Philip Whalen's "The Road Runner." Dore Ashton on painting, Henry Miller on Big Sur, and San Francisco Chronicle columnist Ralph Gleason on jazz rounded out the perspective with intelligent sidebar pieces.

The issue closed with Jack's "October in the Railroad Earth" and "Howl." Only Corso was absent from the cornucopia; there had been so much material that his poems had to await the third issue. Rexroth had already informed Nation readers in February about "San Francisco's Mature Bohemians," comparing Jack to Henry Miller, Celine, Durrell, Beckett, and Algren--"only a good deal more so . . . this is the literature of disengagement, but it is a wildly passionate disengagement . . . a smashing indictment." Publication of the Review brought respectful notices in Louise Bogan's New Yorker column, an article--"Avant Garde at the Golden Gate"--in Saturday Review, and a photo essay on New York bohemia in the sugar daddy-Johnny Walker Red world of Esquire.[12]

Even more than Donald Allen and the Review, Captain William Hanrahan of the San Francisco Police Department Juvenile Division brought national attention to the esoteric subject of poetry; in June 1957 he put art on the front page by arresting Ferlinghetti and clerk Shig Murao of

City Lights Bookstore for selling obscene material like Howl. Embarrassed by the arrests, San Francisco's newspapers sneered at the police with headlines like "Making A Clown of San Francisco" and "Cops Don't Allow No Renaissance Here," and mocked Prosecutor Ralph McIntosh's inept attempts to discuss prosody with defense witnesses Mark Schorer of Berkeley, Kenneth Rexroth, and Chronicle critics Vincent McHugh and Luther Nichols.

Judge Clayton Horn taught church school on Sundays, but Defense Counsel Jake "The Master" Ehrlich's presentation led Horn to issue a decision thumpingly on the side of literary freedom. At first Jack had been amused by the trial, imagining what lawyers would do with lines like "and sweetened the cunts of a thousand girls in the sunset." Soon he was thoroughly intimidated by police and politics, and though Horn's decision pleased him, he pledged to remain a quiet bhikku. In the course of the arrest and trial, Howl sales had expanded enormously, never to slow down.

Late in August, Jack left Florida for New York to enjoy his September publication. Out on Cape Cod, a young New York Times editor named Gilbert Millstein--the man who had solicited Holmes' 1952 Beat Generation article--was writing On the Road's first review. It was singular good fortune that brought the book to Millstein, only a fill-in on the daily Times reviewing staff. Orville Prescott, nicknamed "Prissy," the dean of the Times reviewers, was

providentially on vacation. Had he written the review, it would have surely been as negative as the Sunday piece that followed Millstein's article by three days.

At the same time, Joe Gould, comrade of Maxwell Bodenheim and the last survivor of the pre-World War I New York bohemia of Mabel Dodge, John Reed, the Provincetown Players, and Seven Arts, died a penniless bum at Pilgrim State Mental Hospital.[13]

CHAPTER XIII

SUCCESS, MORE-OR-LESS

There are always two parties, the party of the Past and the party of the Future; the Establishment and the Movement. At times the resistance is reanimated, the schism runs under the world and appears in literature, philosophy, church, state and social customs.
Ralph Waldo Emerson

stay in line. stay in step. people
are afraid of someone who is not
in step with them. it makes them
look foolish to themselves for
being in step. it might even
cross their mind that they themselves
are in the wrong step.
Bob Dylan

Was not so much our finding America
as it was America
Finding its voice in us . . .
Gregory Corso

When a society becomes afraid of its poets, it is afraid of itself.
Lenore Kandel[1]

Reading Millstein's review in a newspaper hastily plucked from a newstand late in the night, Jack must have felt like Bobby Thomson watching his homerun drop over the fence or an actor who'd just heard his name read off at the Oscars; the review blessed him with the impossibly rare sensation of unequivocal triumph, certified by the good gray Times. Millstein hailed On the Road's publication as an "historic occasion," and compared it with The Sun Also Rises as a generational testament. "The most beautifully

executed, the clearest and most important utterance yet made by the generation Kerouac himself named 'beat' . . . On the Road is a major novel."

On Sunday, the Times Book Review waffled, first praising the book as "enormously readable and entertaining," then dismissed it as "a sideshow--the freaks are fascinating although they are hardly part of our lives." To understand On the Road one somehow had to believe in life and its potentialities and have an intuitive, sensual connection to the notions of freedom and the quest; since most critics had never experienced anything remotely like the Road, they savaged the book.

It was "verbal goofballs" to the Saturday Review, "infantile, perversely negative" to the Herald Tribune, "lack[ed] . . . seriousness" to Commonweal, "like a slob running a temperature" to the Hudson Review, and a "series of Neanderthal grunts" to Encounter. The New Yorker labelled "Dean Moriarity" (Neal's pseudonym) "a wild and incomprehensible ex-convict; Atlantic thought him "more convincing as an eccentric than as a representative of any segment of humanity," and Time diagnosed him a victim of the Ganser Syndrome, where people weren't really mad--they only seemed to be.

Herbert Gold, an old Columbia acquaintance of Ginsberg's and a man who considered himself hip, wrote the most overtly hostile piece for the Nation. His brilliantly

twisted review first incorrectly identified Jack as a cool hipster, then sneered that he cared too much to be a hipster. "Kerouac has appointed himself prose celebrant to a pack of unleashed zazous who like to describe themselves as Zen Hipsters," Gold wrote. On the Road "is proof of illness rather than a creation of art, a novel." Gold saved his foulest spleen for his old friend Allen ("Carlo Marx"), who was a "perenially perverse bar mitzvah boy, proudly announcing, 'Today I am a madman. Now give me the fountain pen.'"

Paul Goodman's review of On the Road for Midstream thoughtfully suggested that the Road rebellion was too narrow, and only the Village Voice offered a positive assessment, lauding Jack as "not just a writer, not just a talent, but a voice . . . a rallying point for the elusive spirit of rebellion of these times, that silent scornful sit-down strike of the disaffiliated."[2]

Just as the prose critics laid down their knives, the slow moving poetry reviews caught up with Howl. They were as grotesquely harsh as their associates. John Ciardi wrote in Saturday Review that the work had "a kind of tireless arrogance at least as refreshing as it is shallow," Poetry mumbled dimly about its "celebration of the intellectual outlaw," and James Dickey gave the Sewanee Review a piece that attacked Howl as an "exhibitionist welter of unrelated associations, wish-fulfillment fantasies, and self-

righteous maudlinness." Perhaps the ugliest review came from a Columbia classmate named John Hollander in Partisan Review; he conceded that Ginsberg had talent and an ear, but yawned that Howl was a "dreadful little volume . . . very short and very tiresome." Later Allen counter-attacked: "Poetry has been attacked by an ignorant and frightened bunch of bores who don't understand how it's made, and the trouble with these creeps is they wouldn't know poetry if it came up and buggered them in broad daylight." However sure Jack and Allen were of their art, the arrogant hostility of the establishment was debilitating.3

Over the course of the fall, "Beat" articles appeared in magazines from Life to Commentary, and there were several pieces in Saturday Review's popular "Tradewinds" column. Life's "Big Day for Bards at Bay" concentrated on jazz-poetry readings, with pictures of Allen, McClure, Brother Antoninus, Rexroth and Ferlingehtti. In the intellectual press, Norman Podhoretz disparaged the San Francisco Renaissance as "a product of Rexroth's publicistic impulses," and with a bored dusting of their collective hands, the critics dismissed the little flurry of unapproved activity and went back to talking about the Soviet Union's satellite Sputnik, which had been put into orbit on October 4th, or about the American troops Eisenhower had dispatched to racially troubled Little Rock, Arkansas.

Though On the Road made the best-seller lists for five

weeks and reached the Number Eleven spot, that fall American critics chose another best-seller for their approval, James Gould Cozzens' By Love Possessed, which displaced Peyton Place as Number One while at the same time winning tremendously favorable reviews. Rather than embrace the threatening energy and vision of the Road, the critics preferred what Dwight MacDonald called a "novel of resignation," a latinate, polysyllabic story of a reasoning, moralistic man--a prig in fact--who snuffed out his emotions and senses that he might be a more servile citizen.[4]

The day after On the Road was published, Jack dreamt of having his head bandaged from a wound while the police chased him. He ducked into hiding inside a parade of children chanting his name, which shielded him as they all walked into Mongolian exile. No exile nor children's crusade could block his fate now, no matter what the future cost. His long suffering dues were about to pay off in stunning success, Madison Avenue-style. Warner Brothers Films offered a hundred thousand dollars for movie rights, Jack told Cassady, and Sterling Lord smiled and asked for more; Marlon Brando was rumored to be interested in the project. Lillian Hellman solicited a play from Jack and Lord closed quick money deals with Esquire, Pageant, and Playboy. Success meant more than an end to rejection slips. For Jack,

the adulation of the New York hip scene was like a dose of good heroin straight in the arm. Just as the subteraneans had fondled Jackson Pollack, they began to rub against Jack for luck. He was a literary hunchback somehow, a brute who had carried the load and paid the price; yet Jack had won.

What horrified Jack was that his fans weren't even groping him, but "JackKerouacauthorofOntheRoad," and the Ti Jean inside him began to crumble. Abuse he could comprehend, but the inhuman blankness of an image-blinded fan was far beyond him. For a quarter-century Jack Kerouac had been an observer, a voyeur who could not always go through doors but took brilliant pictures through his keyhole. Now he was strapped to a chair with what seemed like all of New York City peering through the hole at him. It was impossible. Even immersed in his booze, "my liquid suit of armor, my shield which not even Flash Gordon's super ray gun could penetrate," it was difficult for him to talk with people. Hungover and trembling, he groaned to John Holmes, "I can't stand to meet anybody anymore. They talk to me like I wasn't me." The fans wanted Jack to be "Dean Moriarity," the free American cowboy, the limitless man who lived on life's mental frontiers. What no one beyond friends knew was that On the Road was six years old and superceded by much greater art. In the public's eye, Jack was everlastingly condemned to be a simple vagabond.

In the week after publication, John Holmes received thirty-five phone calls asking to be introduced to Kerouac. Joyce Glassman's telephone rang with women screeching, "You're young, I'm twenty-nine, and I've got to fuck him now!" Jack had never learned Gore Vidal's lesson, that "in an age of total publicity personality is all that matters," and when he went on John Wingate's popular TV program "Nightbeat," he "clammed up almost totally," as a reporter remarked to him, "looking like nothing so much as a scared rabbit."

"Yeah man," Jack said. "I was plenty scared. One of my friends told me don't say anything, nothing that'll get you into trouble. So I just kept saying no, like a kid dragged in by a cop. That's the way I thought of it--a kid dragged up before the cops."

His success had spun into a hideous kaleidoscope of greedy faces, all feeding on him to steal a little of his new power, too much whiskey and attention, too many photographers and autograph seekers and excited nights for a shy Bodhisattva, too much. "You know what I'm thinking when I'm in the midst of all that--the uproar, the booze, the wildness?" Jack asked John Holmes in a still moment later. "I'm always thinking; What am I doing here? Is this the way I'm supposed to feel?"

In October he retreated to Orlando, where he caught up on his sleep and cleared up some business. Though he detested the usual artificiality of blurbs, Jack was happy to send one to Ferlinghetti for Corso's new Pocket Poets volume Gasoline: "A tough young kid from the Lower East Side who rose like an angel over the rooftops and sang Italian songs as sweet as Caruso and Sinatra, but in words." As earlier he'd plugged John Holmes at Random House, he sent Ferlinghetti some samples of Burroughs' "Naked Lunch" and also tried to interest City Lights in "Old Angel Midnight" or "Mexico City Blues" as a Pocket Poets Book to fulfill the Corso-Ginsberg-Kerouac triumvirate. As Allen had beatifically imagined, "God knows the revolution that would take place in American poetry if you as well as Gregory and me were published by Ferlinghetti."

Jack wrote a play about the "Beat Generation" for Lillian Hellman--she rejected it but later he salvaged the third act for a movie--then sat down at his typewriter early in November and in ten sittings wrote "The Dharma Bums." It was a tightly-knit straight line narrative and more planetary than mystical, not because Viking was salivating for a commercial duplication of On the Road but because it was Gary's portrait. The form flowed from the subject, and "The Dharma Bums" was superlative reportage that carved a word sculpture of Snyder in the tough, supple material of

Gary's own speech and poetry.

Philip Whalen read it later and was profoundly impressed; it was not a simple recording of events, he thought, but "as complicated as Flaubert" in its selection. Recalling the events of two years past, Whalen realized that it "could have been four times as sensational," for Jack had said much by what he failed to say, deleting Neal and the racy blond who drove him up the coast from this religious chronicle of bhikkus and mountaintops and the void in a drop of dew. "He went," Snyder later said, "for the simple, interesting, paradoxical bones of things."

One sentence later excised by Malcolm Cowley concerned an argument with Gary, who mock sputtered, "You old son of a bitch, you're going to end up asking for the Catholic rites on your death bed." Jack leered, "How did you know, my dear? Didn't you know I was a lay Jesuit?" Totally absorbed in Gary's personality for ten nights, Jack even allowed overt politics in the book: "Colleges being nothing but grooming schools for the middle class non-identity . . . rows of well-to-do houses with lawns and TV sets in each living room with everybody looking at the same thing . . . while the Garys of the world prowl the wilderness to find the ecstasy of the stars." There were not many books, reflected Whalen as he put it away on his shelf, that remind people "that there are other things to do besides getting out of Yale and going into Kidder and Peabody in Wall Street."[6]

The book finished, Jack went to New York the week before Christmas to make a reading appearance at the Village Vanguard jazz club, and initiated a series of critical exchanges that kept him uselessly trying to explain poetry to reporters who wanted nothing from him but hot copy. He was like a sweaty faced political candidate in a losing race, always responding, never relaxed. No one would really listen to him at the Vanguard, he felt, so he got extremely drunk. Dan Wakefield sniped in the Nation that his reading was a sordid attempt to boost On the Road's sale to Hollywood; still, baring his soul on stage was a brave gesture for a man so shy, especially after the police harassed him about registering as a performer and owner Max Gordon forced him to read accompanied by musicians. Kids slogged in off the road and stacked their rucksacks in the Vanguard's cloakroom to hear him read from Ginsberg, Burroughs, and "October in the Railroad Earth." Wobbling all the way, he stayed sufficiently innoculated by Jack Daniels to finish, then assured one reporter that he'd never do it again. "I'm no Jackie Gleason," he grimaced, "I'm a poet."

Fame was a "bad bit," he said, and only a rare sense of irony could have extracted some sour amusement from the fact that Memere adored Jack's success, since it had made her the recipient of a fat stack of letters from long-lost relatives who now invited them to visit. The music critics were as bilious as their literary confreres, and

even the usually generous Nat Hentoff attacked him.

Jazz truth was the putative subject of Jack's December Playboy article about a Negro hobo, "The Rumbling Rambling Blues." Pure fiction and one of his flimsiest pieces, the Playboy story along with the passage in On the Road about "wishing to be a Negro" left him open to critical bleats of "Crow Jim," reverse racism. Kenneth Rexroth weighed in with the comment, "Now there are two things Jack knows nothing about--Jazz and Negroes," to be contradicted by three writers. The avant-garde essayist Anais Nin included Jack in her estimate that America's most important writing derived from jazz, and though the San Francisco Chronicle's distinguished jazz columnist Ralph Gleason acknowledged the Crow Jim label, he also opined that "Kerouac leaves you with no feeling of despair, but rather of exaltation . . . meanwhile writers like Kerouac and music like jazz are [the present generation's] voice."

An even more professional opinion came from the composer and musician David Amram, who accompanied on french horn as Jack read poetry at the Brata Art Gallery on East 10th St. in December, and again at the Circle in the Square Theater in February 1958. Jack had "a phenomenal ear," Amram said. When Jack improvised words like notes to go with David's horn, "it was like playing duets with a great musician." Amram also came along when Jack went to Brooklyn

College to give a lecture. He was "not there to promote his books," wrote Amram, "but to share a state of mind and a way of being." His way completely befuddled the students. Warmed with Thunderbird wine, Jack performed as a Zen master, first telling his audience that he wrote because he was bored, and published to make money. "I'm a story-teller and a preacher like Dostoyevsky," Jack proclaimed.

After a few stories, he opened the floor to questions that he tried to answer Roshi-style, turning the question back on the questioner. When a proto-writer asked about the influence of Celine, Jack solemnly replied, "You've got the answer in your question, and it's a beautiful answer." Brooklynites were unready to accept either Jack's style or his running argument that to add to his writing would be dishonest, and the atmosphere grew mildly hostile. At last a blue-eyed, curly headed young man who resembled Harpo Marx rose up and asked Jack, "When you take all those trips . . . to Mexico and the desert and all, doesn't your mother ever get worried?" The house broke up in such noisy laughter that Jack never had to shock them by saying yes.

Jack's wildeyed mystical rantings usually left his pragmatic American audiences bemused and bewildered; since they had utterly no intellectual preparation to understand mysticism, most Americans assumed he was slightly crazy. Late in January Jack finished typing up "The Dharma Bums" and returned to New York to have a dourly skeptical Mike

Wallace take him step by step through his beliefs on CBS television news. Often, what read well in the Diamond Sutra somehow failed to communicate through the screen.[7]

To Wallace, Jack's vision of golden light on drugs sounded "like a self-destructive way to seek God." "Oh, it was tremendous," replied Jack. "I woke up sick about the fact that I had come back to myself, to the flesh of life."

Wallace: "You mean that the Beat people want to lose themselves?"

Kerouac: "Yeah. You know, Jesus said to see the Kingdom of Heaven you must lose yourself . . ."

Wallace: "Then the Beat Generation loves death?"

Kerouac: "Yeah. They're not afraid of death."

Wallace: "Aren't you afraid?"

Kerouac: "Naw . . . what I believe is that nothing is happening."

Wallace: "What do you mean?"

Kerouac: "Well, you're not sitting here. That's what you think. Actually, we are great empty space . . . an empty vision in one mind."

Though Jack was utterly serious when he spoke of death and emptiness, the hard-nosed reporters whom he lectured heard it only as absurdity, and were swiftly convinced that he was a fool--or a madman. When he told Saturday Review's "Tradewinds" column that "We love every-

thing, Billy Graham, the Big 10, Rock and Roll, Zen, apple pie, Eisenhower--we dig it all. We're in the Vanguard of the new religion," the Review's editors chuckled gently; Time magazine's first "Beat" article covered the Wallace interview, but there probably wasn't a soul in the Time-Life building who really wanted to understand what Jack was trying--however confusedly--to say.

Coping with the media's complacent ignorance of his spiritual monologues was difficult, but far worse were the outrageously false assumptions made about him. Jack had waited seven long years with Goethe's idealism as his main support; he had not endured to pose as a cynical nihilist vomiting out America, but to affirm comradely communication and spiritual search. "The Beat Generation believes," he wrote in Pageant, "that there will be some justification for all the horror of life." Beatific in the tradition of St. Francis, the Beats were "sweating for affirmation" in a "search for gnosticism, absolute belief in a Divinity of Rapture. I believe God is Ecstasy in His Natural Immanence." True humanity was possible only when one was nakedly honest and free to rave unashamed. The "Beatific" tradition was as ancient as the Alchemical Brotherhood of medieval times, and was related to the 19th Century's Diggers, Romantic Poets, and American Transcendentalists. But the line had been interrupted in the U.S., and the post-war critics held very different basic beliefs; since they assumed that their

own values were absolute, they presumed that Jack's work--any work, in fact, that dared to disagree with their fundamental assumptions within the context of contemporary life--was an act of rejection and hostility, and ascribed to it the usual quality of maniacal documents, violence.

For that Jack had history, Norman Mailer, and his old friend John Clellon Holmes to thank. In the placid consensus of the fifties, the only visible dissidents to middle class morality had been violent juvenile delinquents, homicidal maniacs like Charles Starkweather and Carol Fugate, or the intellectualized hipsters propounded by Norman Mailer's widely publicized 1957 essay, "The White Negro."

In a search for existential authenticity, Mailer had proposed in his article that the only way to resist the "psychic havoc of the concentration camps and the atom bomb" was to "accept the terms of death" and "encourage the psychopath in oneself." Identifying this gut-level, orgasm oriented lifestyle with the street wit of the urban black man, Mailer vowed that "the psychopath murders--if he has the courage--out of the necessity to purge his violence, for if he cannot empty his hatred then he cannot live, his being is frozen with implacable self-hatred for his cowardice."

In an article in the February 1958 issue of Esquire, a piece called "The Philosophy of the Beat Generation," John Holmes recalled Jack's TV desire to have "God . . . show me his face," but ultimately Holmes was closer to Mailer

in spirit. John described a grotesquely meaningless murder as a "specifically moral . . . crime, which the cruel absence of God (deSade) made obligatory if a man were to prove that he was a man and not a blot of matter." Much of "The Philosophy of the Beat Generation" was brilliant, analyzing the values of tribe--"inviolability of comradeship, respect for confidences, and an almost mystical regard for courage"--and the relationship of James Dean and Charley Parker to "Beat."

But Holmes' and Mailer's theories of the psychic need for violence answered their own needs and came from a universe that excluded Jack Kerouac. Jack craved authenticity as well, but he was the man who'd grown disgusted at a bullfight, the man who told TV viewers that every night he prayed to "my little brother, who died, and to my father, and to Buddha, to Jesus Christ, and to the Virgin Mary . . . I pray to those five people." Kerouac's bohemians he described as "ragged, beatific, beautiful in an ugly graceful new way . . . characters of a special spirituality who didn't gang up but were solitary Bartlebies staring out at the dead wall window of our civilization." They bore bells and candles, not switchblades, were "high, ecstatic, saved," not murderous.[8]

With this on-going argument about violence as a background, Grove Press brought out The Subterraneans in March of 1958. The reviews were predictably hostile.

"Latrine laureate of Hobohemia . . . ambisextrous and hipsterical" cried Time; Kerouac "celebrates the self as something irresponsible, without ever identifying it with a world of objective, relevant values" was the analysis of the Times Book Review. Perhaps the most perceptive comment on the book was offered many years later by Ailene Lee; she suggested that it was written from a petit bourgeois perspective that put down the upper class Lucien and glorified the working class Neal. Only Allen acclaimed Jack's superlative "American actual speech--and thought--reproduction," and among the famous, only Henry Miller was publicly positive. When The Subterraneans came out in paperback, Miller wrote an introduction for it. "Believe me," Miller stated, "there's nothing clean, nothing healthy, nothing promising about this age of wonders--except the telling. And the Kerouacs will probably have the last word."[9]

Early in April of 1958, Jack completed the purchase of a home on the north shore of Long Island and headed for Florida to collect Memere, his cats, and a suitcase full of manuscripts. Photographer Robert Frank accompanied him because Life had given them expenses for a provisional photo-article on the road; as once he'd listened to Neal, Jack now studied Frank's constantly scanning eye, and the way he'd seize his camera for a shot out the window as he drove.

They prowled decrepit old bus stations and a dusty South Carolina barber shop, and fell over themselves grabbing camera and pencil at the sight of an Iowa woman on a Florida beach, "come 1500 miles," noted Jack, "to turn her back on the very ocean and sit behind the open trunk of her husband's car, bored among blankets and tires."

Though Life never published the essay, Jack enjoyed Frank's company greatly, and missed him as he and Memere packed and moved to New York. There they settled in their new home at 34 Gilbert St., Northport, and Jack took cover in a yard full of flowers, writing in the shade of a grape arbor. Good and bad, recent events had overwhelmed him, as if he were a leaf in a whirlwind. He had appeared on several TV shows, including the Wingate program and Jack Paar, and recorded two poetry albums backed by Steve Allen on piano. Kerouac also had the living hell beaten out of him one night at the Kettle of Fish Bar in the Village, when he drunkenly offended three local characters and paid dearly for his lubricated tongue. Dripping blood and badly dazed, he managed to stumble to Joyce Glassman's East 13th St. apartment. She took him to the hospital, where he begged the doctors to "Cauterize my wounds, cauterize my wounds," as if cleansing fire were his only salvation.

Chastened by too much drinking and the swirling undertow of Manhattan fame, Jack pledged to spend an ordered summer at his home in Northport. Through June he avoided

the City, meditating at night under the arbor before losing himself in Dracula, Clark Gable and Marlon Brando on Memere's eternal TV. Lord sold The Subterraneans to MGM for fifteen thousand dollars, and a small time production company picked up the film option for On the Road, with Mort Sahl cast as Neal. Sahl was hardly Marlon Brando, but the check was no less real for that. Sipping iced white port, Jack began work on a new novel about his Lowell childhood. He entitled it with his boyhood nickname "Memory Babe," and briefly contemplated going to Lowell for research. Viking had purchased "The Dharma Bums," and Jack was momentarily so confident that he boasted of converting Madison Avenue to the Way before commercialism besmirched him. He gardened barefoot and in overalls like a child, worked up a sweat shooting baskets at the high school next door, and kept his focus and a sense of pace.[10]

By July it was clear that there was no sanctuary anywhere. College kids came roaring up to the house to get him--and Memere--drunk, and Jack found it impossible to say no to anyone. He was inundated with letters from money grubbers and crackpots and men who desired him sexually, and these disembodied admirers so disturbed him that he decided to forego a visit to Whalen and Snyder in San Francisco that summer, worried that he might be entrapped by a phony narcotics arrest. "Memory Babe" wouldn't gell, and he had to fight with Viking over editorial changes of "The Dharma Bums"

manuscript.

And then there was Rexroth. The maestro had returned to the U.S. from an extended stay in France to discover that his rule as king of the bohemian literary scene had been eclipsed by the New York carpetbaggers Allen, Gregory, and Jack, and he reacted with a review of The Subterraneans that read in part, "Herbert Gold is right: Jack is a square, a Columbia boy who went slumming on Minetta Alley 10 yéars ago and got hooked." In an April Nation article, "Revolt: True or False," Rexroth implied that Jack was a puppet of Madison Avenue, and in that month's New Yorker he snarled, "I've lived in the kind of world that Jack Kerouac imagines he has lived in." When Jack wrote him, Rexroth refused to answer. Screwing up his face in a frown, Jack tried to shrug off Rexroth's venom, but he couldn't understand why the man who was supposed to understand and help the cause of new literature had become so hostile.[11]

In July Jack was relieved of his unintended role as spokesman for the mystical "Beat Generation" by the arrival of Allen Ginsberg. Though Allen was reluctant to "face all them aroused evil forces," as he put it, "for fear I'll close up and try making sense and then really sound horrible," his presence rescued Jack; at last the real impresario-manifesto writer was back, a smiling combination of Diaghelev and Trotsky. Allen understood why the critics

detected revolution in On the Road, and calmly explained to his father that "actually it only seems to be so to people who have accepted standard American values as permanent." "The poets and writers will ultimately have to be priests," he told the press, "sexy illuminated priests who will stand up . . . and take the responsibility for spiritual guidance in this country."

In the fifteen months since Jack had left him in Tangiers, Allen had wandered Europe from Spain to Dachau to Amsterdam, where in between talks with quiet, knitting prostitutes he had read Millstein's review and written Jack, "now you don't have to worry about existing only in my dedication and I will have to weep in your great shadow." Allen had spent most of that winter at 9 Rue Git le Coeur, Paris, in the "Beat Hotel," a little Latin Quarter hostelry run by Madame Rachou, who oddly enough preferred young--even troublesome--Americans to dull Frenchman, and was concierge to Burroughs, Allen, Peter and Gregory.

Impoverished, Allen had been forced to dun Jack for the money he'd loaned him a year and a half before, and Kerouac replied with a drunkenly abusive airgram. But Ginsberg attributed Kerouac's guilty outburst to bad American karma "due to loss of comradely vision," and tried to reassure his harassed brother on the need for patience: "Those who have doubts have doubts, what can you do? Undoubt the whole civilization in one year?" Ginsberg's long

sojourn outside his native land had further sharpened his political perspective, and his long letters to his father were perceptive and prescient analyses of Algeria and Korea, and of colonialism in general. He advocated a "revolution of consciousness in America" that rejected the "war psychosis on both sides."12

In March Jack had tenderly written how much he missed Allen, yet by July his relief at Ginsberg's return was obliterated by his terror at the political atmosphere. His fear was not empty paranoia. Shortly before Allen arrived, they had both learned that in April Neal had been arrested for possession of marijuana, convicted, and sentenced to three years in San Quentin Prison. According to the police, Cassady had smuggled many pounds of Mexican marijuana on the train, but court testimony was confined to two joints he admitted offering two men--who proved to be undercover agents--in exchange for a ride to work. The publicity of On the Road had not created his problems, but rather Neal's boasts in every North Beach bar and coffeehouse that he was "Johnny Potseed," the man who was turning on the whole of San Francisco; Allen mournfully thought Neal "uncool . . . heroic, but uncool." Neal had been distraught ever since Natalie Jackson's death. Try as he might to be a family man, he was so miserable at home that he could only sleep or watch TV, and in the street he pressed his luck with outrageous legal risks, trying to provoke the fates into delivering him up

for the punishment he so abjectly desired.

Prosecution testimony alleged that he had taken forty dollars from two men. Later he suspected that they were agents, and kept the money. Worried that he'd blow their cover, the police arrested him. They arrived in the morning after the children had left for school, but never bothered to search the house, leaving Carolyn to speedily find Neal's home supply and burn it. The Grand Jury concluded that there was insufficient evidence, and released him.

One day later he was rearrested and recharged before the Grand Jury, with bail set at $23,000; at the same time the Southern Pacific Railroad fired him, literally one day before he was eligible for a pension. He had been calm and metaphysically patient during the first arrest, but now he was furious, raging at everyone: At Carolyn, who refused to mortgage the house for his bail, even though he "explained" how he could get $100,000 "easy"; at the incompetent public defender who botched his case; at the judge who demanded that he testify against his fellow defendants.

When his sentencing came, Neal stood frozen, his shackled hands holding his stomach as if in pain, as the judge bellowed about Cassady's "double life" and sentenced him from three years to life with the comment, "I'm sorry about his wife and kids, but I don't like his attitude."

After a temporary stop at Vacaville State Prison for psychiatric testing, Neal packed his books--the Bible, and The Third Classic, St. Teresa's own guide--and moved to a tiny cell at San Quentin. There he swept cotton in the textile mill, screamed prayers to drown out the looms, and glared at the walls and the thirteen tan bars of his cell. On clear days he could sit on his bed and see dust rising off the flying hooves of his beloved thoroughbreds at the race track directly across San Francisco Bay.

In one of his most tragic moments, Jack now deserted Neal and did nothing for him in prison. He hadn't written the Cassadys in many months, and Carolyn had assumed that he feared for his money. Guilty about having possibly contributed to the arrest, Jack described the scene to Phil Whalen with a burst of saccharine optimism that outdid Candide. In Jack's view, Carolyn was painting, Neal was learning and meditating in jail, and both were blooming, beatific contributors to society. Everything was going to be fine, according to Jack. Memere intercepted Allen's letters with the news about Neal and threatened to call the FBI if Ginsberg ever came near the house. Burroughs cursed all the way from Paris that she was a "stupid, small minded . . . peasant incapable of a generous thought or feeling." "Jack has sold Neal's blood and made money . . . Now he will not lift a dollar to help . . . he does not love his mother,

he is shit scared of her." Bill thought Memere's threats to Allen about the FBI were insane, and Jack agreed with him, then resolutely closed his ears, unfocused his eyes, and babbled that Membere was indeed a little goofy about Allen--or something--and really it had nothing at all to do with him anyway.

Sick with kidney stones, Allen stayed away from Northport and accepted Jack's behavior in silence. His absence relieved Jack mightly, for he was wallowing in political fears that summer, and they focused on Ginsberg and his polemics. Ironically, Allen's libertarian radicalism was virtually unique. Left-wing critics generally disliked both Kerouac and Ginsberg; though David McReynolds defended them in Liberation, conventional Socialists like Michael Harrington condemned the Beats as "protest without program."[13]

In August of 1958, Look magazine published an unsigned article entitled "The Bored, the Bearded and the Beat," leading with a picture of North Beach character Hube "the Cube" Leslie. With his goatee, shades, and tatoo--"Blessed, blessed oblivion"--up front like a used car salesman's smile, Hube was the archetypal beatnik, the ripest symbol of the commercialization of On the Road that Jack loathed. San Francisco Chronicle columnist Herb Caen had invented the term "beatnik" in the wake of Sputnik, since "Beat" and sputnik

were "equally far out" to him. The faintly ludicrous ring of the fusion made instant sense to a nation whose lingua franca was embodied in the fat complacency of its best-selling books; "Kids Say the Darndest Things, Don't Eat the Daisies, Pat Boone's 'Twixt Twelve and Twenty, Harry Golden's Only in America, and the collected Dear Abby.

Beatnikdom had begun in February, when Playboy ran a trio of articles--"Cool Swinging in New York," "A Frigid Frolic in Frisco," and another of Herbert Gold's pronunciamentos. Each article painted an absurd picture of cool zombies who bordered on catatonia. Playboy's puppets, of course, bore not the slightest resemblance to Allen, Jack, or Neal. New York's beatniks were figments of the writer's imagination; they were rich, spoke only in bizarre slang, went topless if female, and salted hamburgers with ground glass before serving them to a messenger boy in rhapsodies of lobotomized joy. Playboy's San Francisco beatniks were nearly as nonsensical, and were also a hallucination of the author. Gold's Playboy article lashed out at Maileresque hipster coolness, "sick refrigerator[s]" in flight from emotion, "sex without passion, religion without faith."

A revolutionary later wrote that "The power to define is the power to control": The press had created the astoundingly fraudulent beatnik image of what one article called "The Innocent Nihilists Adrift in Squaresville." The

sad and frightening part of the fraud was that an undoubted majority of Americans accepted it as reality. First Nation and then Saturday Review rushed to bury the phenomenon with hasty obituaries. Sales of Howl and On the Road remained steady.[14]

Despite the fears that the ugly publicity and Neal's arrest had generated, Jack continued to see Allen whenever he visited Manhattan. Allen sometimes disturbed him because ultimately Jack did not understand him, but nothing kept them apart for very long, and on October 15, 1958, they met in the Village, anticipating that evening's publication party for The Dharma Bums. Ginsberg had reverted to his agent role, advising Jack to ignore Viking's requests for further traveloques and put out something wildly experimental like "Dr. Sax," perhaps through Grove. "Don't let Madison Avenue try water you down and make you palatable to reviewer mentality," Allen warned. Ginsberg was also attempting to sell Snyder and Whalen and "Mexico City Blues" either to Grove or James Laughlin's New Directions Press. In a Voice interview that week, he had championed Gregory with the comment, "I'm too literary you know, but Corso can write about moth balls or atom bombs," and went on to list no fewer than twenty worthy young poets across the land, thoroughly impressing the reporter. In a respectful, medita-

tive conclusion, the reporter conceded that he could grasp only part of what Allen was saying; few of his colleagues shared his frankness, as their ridiculously twisted reports made clear. The poetry propaganda business rapidly became a cancer to Allen, and he wanted out, although some of his encounters were enjoyable. He had presented a copy of Howl to Thelonious Monk, and a week later saw him outside the Five-Spot and asked if he'd read it. The silent genius of the piano said, "Yeah, I'm almost through." "Well?" cried Allen. Monk nodded impassively: "It makes sense."

Access to well known people was part of Jack and Allen's new fame. They learned that D. T. Suzuki, America's foremost interpreter of Zen, wanted to see them. The afternoon of October 15th, Jack jumped into a phone booth outside Allen and Peter's Lower East Side apartment and rang up the sage. When Dr. Suzuki's secretary asked "When?", Jack shouted "Right now!", and the three of them caught a cab uptown to his West 94th St. home. It was a nasty irony that as Jack prepared to meet his first Zen patriarch he was incapable of profiting from the experience. The year's permanent rampage of drunken visitors had left him shattered, his hands shaking too badly to type, his Buddhist meditations a thing of the past. In fact, he had begun to write Catholic poems for the church magazine Jubilee.

Still, he was to pass a charming afternoon with Dr. Suzuki, then eighty-seven and a lecturer at Columbia, who as

a writer had influenced Toynbee, Huxley, Heidegger, Jung, John Cage and Dizzy Gillespie among others. Suzuki, a bald little man with prodigious eyebrows, sat them down in chairs and plopped behind his desk. Their talk wandered into koans, and Jack nervously showed the Roshi his own: "When the Buddha was about to speak a horse spoke instead." Suzuki sighed that it was typically Western and overcomplicated. "After all," the old man said, "the Buddha and the horse had some kind of understanding there."

The Master fixed green tea while his visitors wrote haikus, and they sipped and talked about old Chinese prints and religion. In an embarrassing excess, Jack volunteered that he'd had Samadhis (satori, bursts of enlightenment) that had lasted up to half an hour, and lapsed into silence when Dr. Suzuki gently remarked that a true samadhi had no time and all time. Impatient to get to the Viking cocktails, Jack pressed to leave, then indulged one of his quicksilver bursts of enthusiasm and decided that Suzuki was his father. He told the elder, "I would like to spend the rest of my life with you, sir." Suzuki giggled and said "Sometime," waving from the window as they hit the slum street.[15]

As they rode towards the publication party, their thoughts turned to Jack's book. Evaluating The Dharma Bums, Allen had smiled as he told Jack, "This time it should be funny. You'll get attacked for being enlightened." Ginsberg's prescience was straight on, for the critics had

typed Jack, in John Holmes' trenchant phrase, as the "poet of the pad and the bard of bebop," and would not permit him to write about religion. The literati had ignored the mystical aspects of On the Road and The Subterraneans to sell Jack as a dope smoking jazzhound, and now they overlooked the six year time span among the three books. They assumed Jack was cashing in on the Zen fad, and bludgeoned him as "naive" (Hudson Review), "juvenile" (New York Times), and "adolescent" (New Yorker). Time subtitled its review "How the Campfire Boys Discovered Buddhism." Newsweek preferred Japhy Rider (Gary's pseudonym) to the "vicious, animal-like" "Dean Moriarity," but Jack's only good prestigious review came in Nancy Wilson Ross's essay in the Sunday Times. She had already contributed a necessarily superficial but intelligent piece on Zen to Mademoiselle, and her article on The Dharma Bums was sound and respectful.

Ginsberg, however, hailed it in the Village Voice as an "extraordinary mystic testament," a "record of various inner sign posts on the road to understanding of the Illusion of Being," and a review in The American Buddhist was also laudatory. If nothing else, the "Beat" influence, of which The Dharma Bums was the best example, had helped to stimulate a serious interest in Buddhism. In 1957 and 1958 alone there were seven articles on Zen in the mass media, and though the best statement on Beat religion and vision seeking would not appear until Gary Snyder's "Notes

on the Religious Tendencies," some of the Zen articles rose above the pedestrian.[16]

Though Jack had moved to Northport as a quiet retreat safely distant from Manhattan excitements, it had become a prison; no matter where he slept, Jack's dreams had become carnivals of torment, theaters whose curtain rose as Jack sat naked in a field and Jack Paar popped up in front of him with a microphone and camera. Ti Jean tried to fend him off with a flabby-futile punch--and then he was in an unspeakably loathsome maze, or had to dance on a thin high wavering ladder hanging sick in space off the Empire State Building. There were technicolor atom bombs and executions by strangulation. Birds pecked at his brain. Fame had become Moloch and pulverized Jack. The nearly violent attention of curiosity seekers and his own crippling self doubts had squeezed him, but the shrill antagonism of America's critical establishment was the final blow. The fall and winter of 1958-59 brought three more installments of hostility, as New York's intellectual community "defended" itself with the gentility of Attila the Hun in pieces by John Updike, Robert Brustein, and Norman Podhoretz.

Slick and urbane as always, the New Yorker presented its attack in the form of a John Updike satire entitled "On

the Sidewalk." Young Lee (Jack) threw a fond backward glance at his mom standing in "pearly mystical United States home light" and leaped onto his trike to join mad, scooter riding Gogi (Neal), an imbecile saint with a bandaid flapping off his thumb, to go "contemplate those holy hydrants." At last Gogi tore off to gogogo, deserting Lee, who wasn't allowed to cross the street. Lee mourned, "I'm thirty-nine now, and felt sad."

Jack had sacrificed two marriages and committed a lifetime to his art; politely shrugging off hard-edged satire was not in him.

Columbia lecturer Robert Brustein fired the second round. A graduate of Amherst, Yale and Columbia, Brustein produced two essentially identical essays--"America's New Culture Hero" and "The Cult of Unthink"--that were naked projections of queasy class fear. In both pieces, Brustein hypothesized a new American "inarticulate hero," a composite of Marlon Brando in The Wild Ones and On the Waterfront, James Dean, and "Dean Moriarity." Of medium height and lower class birth, with a "surly and discontented expression," beetling brows, and uncombed hair, the new hero was muscular and slouchy and scratched himself a lot. "Self indulgent and inwardly conformist," the hero was usually "cool," which Brustein likened to the death aspects of Jack's and Allen's religious vows toward transcendence.

Primarily, the hero was "inarticulate," unequipped

with middle class verbal facility. His portentious silence frightened the intellectuals, bespoke reservoirs of physical strength, grace and sexual power. As it had with black men, the intellectual class flinched at its own fantasies of macho strength in the Beats. Caught up in their own traditional verbal violence, the critics concluded that these stupid, muscle rippling hoodlums must certainly be physically violent. "Kerouac, McClure, and the others [Jackson Pollock, for one] fling words on a page not as an act of communication but as an act of aggression"; Brustein warned his colleagues to be "prepared for violence in every page."

Agitated beyond his patience, Jack wrote a reply to the characterization. He reminded the public that there had not been the least suggestion of violence in On the Road. Rather, it was about tenderness among wild young hell raisers; giggling Dean Moriarity was not a knive-wielding hoodlum but "spiteless."17

For Jack, there was worse to come. In the spring of 1958, Partisan Review published what was undoubtedly the most extreme attack of them all, Norman Podhoretz' "The Know-Nothing Bohemians." Podhoretz informed his readers that Jack and his friends were "hostile to civilization; [they] worship primitivism, instinct, energy, 'blood.'" Jack's intellectual interests were reported to run to "mystical doctrines, irrationalist philosophies,"

and in a genteel smear of red paint, "left-wing Reichianism." Jack supposedly used bop slang--although he rarely did--to demonstrate "solidarity with the primitive vitality and spontaneity they feel in jazz or of expressing contempt for coherent rational discourse." When Podhoretz accused Jack of "an anti-intellectualism so bitter that it makes the ordinary American's hatred of eggheads seem positively benign," Jack plaintively asked a reporter if any critic had ever read Goethe's idealistic biography Dichtung und Warheit.

Podhoretz' fearful hysteria had already left truth in another--and far away--universe to create a viciously libelous portrait of Jack that was inconceivably false, yet his frenzy knew no bounds: "Even the relatively mild ethos of Kerouac's books can spill over easily into brutality, for there is a suppressed cry in these books: Kill the intellectuals who can talk coherently, kill the people who can sit still for five minutes at a time, kill those incomprehensible characters who are capable of getting seriously involved with a woman, a job, a cause."

Allen thought Podhoretz' problem lay partly in the fact that when Ginsberg had been a literary editor at Columbia he had rejected Norman's poetry. Partly it was, as John Holmes thought, that Podhoretz could not "comprehend the nature of awe and wonder," and "want[ed] things firmly in their places." He was a man uncomfortable with anything

nonverbal or sensual. Securely limited to the ideas of a rational technocratic liberal, Podhoretz--and his class generally--could not begin to fathom the Beats. He was left only with the sensation that--in the words of a poet some seven years later--"Something's happening, and you don't know what it is, do you, Mr. Jones?"

The critics were frightened by artists who created in a mental territory unsupported by John Crowe Ransome's tortuous rules, and troubled by the knowledge that more and more copies of Howl and On the Road were going out to Des Moines and Pocatello and El Paso, where few people indeed bought Partisan Review.[17]

On November 8, 1958, Jack made another public attempt to respond to all the criticism he had received by participating in the Brandeis Forum with Professor Ashley Montagu, New York Post Editor James E. Wechsler, and English writer Kingsley Amis. Their putative subject was "Is There a Beat Generation?"

Kerouac was unprepared as to the ground rules, and unnerved by the evening. By all the contemporary rules of literary debate, he'd lost when he walked in, roaring drunk, to read his address (later "The Origins of the Beat Generation" in Playboy). Swaying gently over the podium, he deftly mixed history with mysticism in a manner that

entranced the student audience and confused his co-panelists. "It is because I am Beat, that is, I believe in beatitude," Jack said, "and that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son to it." "Who knows," he continued, his speech still clear, "but that the universe is not one vast sea of compassion actually, the veritable holy honey, beneath all this show of personality and cruelty?" He traced the Beat Generation's roots to "the glee of America, the honesty of America," its "wild self-believing individuality." Harpo, Lamont Cranston, Krazy Kat, Popeye and Lester Young were the immediate progenitors of this "revolution of manners," and Jack swore "Woe unto those who don't realize that America must, will, is changing now, for the better I think . . . Woe unto those who would spit on the Beat Generation--the wind will blow it back."

His checkered shirt, black jeans, and ankle boots marked him off from the suited men on the panel; his closing poem, a mystic chorus of love and death from "Mexico City Blues," was from another world. Amis was erudite and polished as he briskly denied the existence of "The Angry Young Men" of England. Wechsler proudly asserted that he was "one of the few un-reconstructed radicals of my generation," and came off as the most vigorous philistine since the hero of Front Page. "Life is complicated enough," he grumped, "without trying to make it a poem." The Beats, thought Ashley Montagu, were the "ultimate expression of a civilization

whose moral values had broken down."

Jack was a clown. Impolitely roaming the stage, he giggled and shouted interruptions of Wechsler's profundities. He thought of himself as a "Zen Lunatic," but conceded to Buddhist Phil Whalen in a sober moment later that he'd become corrupt somehow, empty, and tired. "Live your lives out" said the Wechsler mentality. "Nay, Love your lives out," Jack bellowed as the evening came to a close. When critics reproached him for his lack of dignity, he explained that writing was not a gloomy profession, but an experience of the moment. Drunk or sober, crabby or expansive, Jack was one with his art, never crafted or polished for presentation.

Amused by the consternation of the critics, Allen and Gregory were in high glee as they sat around after the Forum. In the silly hours after midnight, Allen leaned over and urgently hissed, "Look, we've done all this, we've made great literature. Why don't we do something REAL great and take over the WORLD!"

Tugging at Jack's sleeve, Gregory added, "I'll be your HENCHMAN!"

Jack liked the joke, but intruded a note of reality; he shrugged and sighed, "Awww, I just want to be Cervantes alone by moonlight."[19]

CHAPTER XIV

ON THE ROAD IN A CORVETTE STINGRAY

> The general image of beatniks built up from Movies, Time, TV, Daily News, Post etc. is among the hep a fake and among the mass Evil and among the liberal intellectuals a mess--but that is weirdly good I dig, that we are still so purely Obscure to philistines that it's inevitable that it be misunderstood--since how can a whole Nation perceive the Illusion of Life in one year?
>
> Allen Ginsberg

Jack celebrated the New Year 1959 with Lucien in a traveling drunk that left him befuddled by a nightmarish hangover on January 2: He slumped in front of the TV in Northport and tried to ignore the telegrams from Newsweek and the phone calls from Life that clamored for his attention. Worse still, Memere missed Nin and unmercifully needled him about it. An Old Crow highball in his hand, Jack brooded deeply over how much he owed Memere for the years she'd supported his art, and exactly what price she was exacting from him now. She hadn't approved of the way Joyce Glassman washed dishes on her few visits to Northport, and for various other reasons Joyce had drifted away from Jack in the past summer.

That fall he found a new lover named Dodie Mueller, and she was a very special woman. Dodie was the widow of the painter Jan Mueller, a creative and independent artist in her own right, and she and Jack got on extremely well. As a worried Peter Orlovsky had noted, Jack was "calm and

peaceful in Northport but its [sic] when he comes to the city that too much commotion flies around he gets drunk too fast." Now Jack had in Dodie a loving companion in the city, and Peter hoped that she might be his salvation. At thirty-two, Dodie was an incredibly vibrant woman, a hard drinking rocker with long, beautiful dark hair, a husky-sensual voice, and a tremendous laugh. Her husband had died only the previous year, and that fall Jack had helped greatly to ease her grief and renew her life. She thought he was "sweet and kind," and when he asked her to marry him and go to Paris, she would have said yes but for Memere.

Sitting in her vibrator chair on Sunday morning, Memere would swill cheap whiskey and lo-cal ginger ale as she said her rosary with TV's Cardinal Spellman; her piety was obvious, but the glass at her side revealed a malevolent flaw. She was "despicable and obscene" to Dodie, an evil ghoul who had her clutches in Jack and would never release him. She controlled her son's finances through their joint bank account, and manipulated his social life by her refusal to permit him to sleep with women in his home. Memere had lost her husband and her first born son, and now Jack was everything to her but a sex partner; when they fought, Dodie said, "it was a lover's quarrel." Memere had given Jack the structure of support, the hot dinners and clean laundry, from which to write, and he owed her

tribute. Further, Jack had relinquished responsibility over a major part of his life and become so purely a perceptual instrument that he refused to count the price of his dependence on her, so that when Dodie entered his life it was too late.

Though he blanched at his mother's voracious anti-semitism, Jack allowed her to ban Allen from his home, and so became lonely and drank more. As he grew more thoroughly besotted, Jack was less and less able to communicate with Allen and his other friends when he did venture into New York, and so became more completely reliant on Memere for his most basic views and moods. "Immaculately-sick-clean," Gabrielle would grow furious when Dodie came into the kitchen without a hair net, and after Dodie washed the dishes, Memere would re-do them--and get them cleaner. Mrs. Kerouac called Dodie "La Sauvage" for her bare feet, long black hair, and Indian ancestry, but one night she decided Dodie was worse than barbaric. They'd had a wonderful candle lit roast beef dinner, and in the dreamy sated reverie after, Dodie had played with the soft dripping candle wax. Early the next morning Memere cornered Jack in the kitchen and hissed at him that his lady was a "witch" making a voodoo doll to steal him away from her. Jack knew his mother was sick, but only shrugged; he saw his fate, but could not reject Memere to save himself.[1]

Northport was quite pleasant when Memere visited Nin

in Florida. Jack and Dodie took long, peaceful walks, went ice skating, or read Macbeth, and Dodie gave Jack painting lessons. He had a perceptive eye and was rather good, splashing enthusiastically away in an expressionist style that resembled his writing. All of his subjects were Roman Catholic, most often the newly anointed Pope John, whom he loved. At Dodie's Village studio, Jack watched her paint and talked about Paris, Neal, and Gerard, or Shakespeare and Proust, the only authors he read any more. The couple haunted the Five-Spot Cafe, listening raptly to Ornette Coleman and Don Cherry before they hit Jack's favorite drinking bars, the White Rose Taverns. A seedy Bowery style chain, the White Roses were frequented by the working class men with whom Jack felt really comfortable. At the very least, they accepted his alcoholism. As a rule, Jack was a noisily emotional drunk, and grated on most people. He loved Dodie's sense of humor for not chiding him about his exploits.

Jack spent most of early 1959 in the Village with Dodie, because he'd become involved in a new project, a film called Pull My Daisy. Eventually, Director Alfred Leslie begged Jack to stay off the "set"--Leslie's 4th Avenue loft--because his Bowery bum guests disrupted filming. Jack must have been in rare form to be noticeable in a scene where the cast and its visitors smoked grass in the wings while making jokes to break up the cameraman,

Jack's photographer-road friend, Robert Frank. The frequently unclothed "stars," Allen, Peter, and Gregory, regularly threatened either to jump out the window or douse passers-by with water. Pull My Daisy was a long way from Cecil B. DeMille and The Ten Commandments.

The Director was a well known Village artist who'd given up film as a teenager to concentrate on his painting. Disgusted by the emotionless surrealists, Leslie wanted to make non-Hollywood but popular narrative movies, and in the mid-1950s he had joined with Robert Frank. On the Road and Frank convinced Leslie that they should film something of Jack's, but there seemed to be too many possibilities after he read all the manuscripts that Jack showed him. Then he visited Northport, and sat in Kerouac's spare, tiny bedroom, its dressers filled with notebooks and typescripts, a crucifix over the bed. Jack had reread the third act of "The Beat Generation," the play he'd written for Lillian Hellman, and then spontaneously recited a new version of it onto tape. When Leslie heard the tape, he concluded--unaware that there was a slim basis of reality in the tale of the Bishop's visit to Neal Cassady's house--that all the characters were aspects of Jack, like Vittorio DeSica's The Bicycle Thief.

They inveigled Walter Guttman, a stock broker and aesthete, into bankrolling them with funds he had charmed mostly out of Jack Dreyfus of the Dreyfus Fund. Leslie and

Frank wanted actors with authentic pasts, so they cast Allen and Peter as themselves, Larry Rivers the painter and saxophonist as Milo (Neal), Mooney Peebles as the Bishop, composer David Amram as Mezz McGillicuddy the "hip-tape man," and Gregory Corso as Jack.

The only professional in the cast was Delphine Selrig as Carolyn, and Delphine had problems. for she did not appreciate the spontaneous chaos unleashed in the loft. Alfred would rehearse the scene and Frank would set his camera angles, but all that followed was in the lap of the Gods. The superficial signs of regular filmmaking--three takes per scene complete with a clapboard and a nine to five shooting schedule--made no meaningful dent in the swirl of Village creativity. When Delphine objected, Gregory snapped, "This is supposed to be real and poetic, beautiful and soulful, not that show business bullshit." Leslie's main, slightly bemused comment was "That's terrific, terrific, terrific . . . I've never seen anything like this. It's alive and spontaneous!" After Leslie and Frank had edited the film, they collected a very stoned but still lucid Jack from Central Park, took him to his old friend Jerry Newman's Esoteric Studios, and showed him Daisy twice. Listening to Amram's piano for his rhythm, Jack spontaneously recited a narrative that sewed the film together. Amram's music was excellent, both the instrumental background and the song "Pull My Daisy"--Jack and Allen's

1949 poem, which Amram had scored for Anita Ellis to sing. Over it all Jack laid down a superb narrative line.

He began in a warm and gentle tone with the phrase "Early morning in the universe," and described the room, Carolyn, Milo's "poor tortured socks," Allen and Peter and their beer, and then Milo and the Bishop. Gregory as Jack posed questions about Buddhism, while Peter asked the Bishop if baseball was holy; the film ended as the boys dragged Milo off to a party. Jack's supple voice neatly caught the quixotic, episodic nature of the film, depicting a nonobjective reality that was more stoned than surreal, and was of a piece with Frank's observant but natural camera work.

Though Daisy shared the common fate of experimental films and died with few bookings after its June 1959 opening, several reviewers were impressed. Peter Bogdanovich called it "brilliant" and Village Voice film columnist Jonas Mekas thought it a "signpost . . . of purity, innocence, humor, truth and simplicity." Dwight MacDonald found it "refreshing," and singled out "the narrative by Jack Kerouac, which kept things rolling along on a tide of laughter and poetry, showing an unexpected virtuosity at the Great American Art of kidding."

Aside from the fact that Leslie had offended his sense of spontaneity by asking for two complete narratives to be spliced together, Jack's only question about the film

concerned a moment when Milo made a pistol of his finger and pointed it at Corso, which introduced a note of violence that Jack thought "played into the hands of literary snobs." His call for self-censorship was emotional but not without foundation. The American establishment had not succeeded in laughing the Beats away, and in a sporadic and unorganized manner, its members began to apply direct repression to the arts.[2]

The major case of early 1959 was the suppression of the Chicago Review, and since Jack's and William Burroughs' "dirty words" had triggered the situation, Jack could not ignore this particular horror. The Chicago Review was a traditional student-run literary quarterly at the University of Chicago that published faculty and student poetry and short ficiton. Though in 1956 it had run "Disaffiliation and the Art of Poetry," by Los Angeles bohemian Lawrence Lipton, the Review became a showcase for the Beats only when Irving Rosenthal assumed the editorship in 1958. Rosenthal filled the Spring 1958 issue with poetry by Ferlinghetti, Ginsberg, Duncan, Lamantia, McClure, and Whalen, an essay by Kerouac ("The Origins of Joy in Poetry"), and an excerpt from Burroughs' "Naked Lunch" manuscript. The Summer issue centered on Zen, with essays by Allen Watts, D. T. Suzuki, and Gary Snyder, and the Autumn issue included a second selection from "Naked Lunch."

Chicago Daily News columnist Jack Mabley didn't

approve of William Burroughs, and his October 1958 column, "Filthy Writing on the Midway", panicked the University administration. With the tacit support of the faculty, the University blocked publication of the Spring 1959 issue, which would have featured Jack's "Old Angel Midnight," more of "Naked Lunch," and Gregory Corso's poems "Army," "Power," and "Police." Led by Rosenthal, all but one member of the Review editorial board resigned to form the magazine Big Table (Jack had suggested the name after seeing a note he'd made to himself about his need for a larger work space), then sent out a plea for financial help that was answered by Allen, Gregory, and Peter. The poets agreed to come to Chicago for a January 29 benefit reading under the ultrarespectable auspices of the George Bernard Shaw Society.[3]

At this time, Allen was at his poetic peak, and after a year and a half of preparation, he had just completed his brilliant elegy and lament for his mother, "Kaddish." Her death, to Allen "that remedy all singers dream of," had closed a circle in his life. "Kaddish" was an exorcism of his memories, of her paranoid screams, her vomiting and diarrhea, and the ratty health food on her windowsill. Moaning of the "three big sticks" in her back, the Fascist microbes Mussolini! out to get her, her abandonment in Pilgrim State Hospital, Naomi had scarred Allen for life. Now he cherished her--and himself. "There, rest. No more

suffering for you," he sang, "I know where you've gone, it's good." "Kaddish" ended in a stillness graced by the holy cawcawcaw of crows over her Long Island grave.

"Mescaline," "Laughing Gas," and "Lysergic Acid," Allen's other contemporary poems, recorded his consciousness and drug experiments; though he was taking enormous risks, he was on Promethean fire for the moment. The Chicago reading was an enormous success, as an overflow crowd of seven hundred jammed the ballroom cheering in ecstatic welcome. Not one of the Chicago newspapers mentioned the audience the next day in their unanimous revulsion at the "Beatnik invasion." Time magazine's account--entitled "Fried Shoes"--was equally bad, a complete distortion that ignored the reading to focus on a one minute exchange between Corso and a Northwestern University Professor at the post-reading party.

Corso: "You don't know about the hollyhocks."

Professor: "If you're going to be irrelevant, you might as well be irrelevant about hollyhocks."

Corso: "Man, this is a drag."

The "Fried Shoes" article did not mention the suppression of the Review, and instead "spat on the appearance of the soul of Poetry in America," wrote the poets in a letter to the editor, "at a time when America needs that soul most . . . You are an instrument of the Devil and you crucify America with your lies: You are the

war creating whore of Babylon and would be damned were you not mercifully destined to be swallowed by oblivion with all created things."

Repression was not merely the result of a weak university or a manipulative press. The Post Office refused Big Table a mailing permit in April, and although Judge Julius "The Just" Hoffman ordered it mailed in July, the mark of Cain had been set on its cover. Though it had exciting contents and a circulation of ten thousand, Big Table was unable to attract financial support and died two years later. Over the coming years, obscenity trials would devour the time and money of poets Michael McClure (The Beard, 1966), Lenore Kandel (The Love Book, 1968), and William Burroughs (Naked Lunch, 1962). In June of 1959, New York City authorities required unpaid Beat poets to register with the police in order to read in coffeehouses. In Los Angeles that September, a noisy bohemian bar in the Venice neighborhood drew repeated arrests and citations. Distracted by the furor, Jack hid in Northport.[4]

One of Jack's few visitors at his Long Island home was New York Post reporter Alfred G. Aronowitz, who somehow managed to charm his skittish subject into an interview. Post editor James E. Wechsler's son was reading On the Road and smoking marijuana with beatniks, so Wechsler had dis-

patched his star feature writer to do a hatchet job. Suspicious of everything Aronowitz stood for, Jack quixotically intuited that the glib, materialistic, middle-class Jew on his doorstep was sympathetic, and his instincts proved correct.

The Kerouac who revealed himself to Aronowitz was a man obsessed with money and bitter about his treatment as a literary figure. In between his memories of the week at the Village Vanguard, School, the Navy, the "St. Louis clique" of 1945, and the creation of the term "Beat Generation," Jack assured Aronowitz that he'd "only paid fourteen" for his house. When he spoke of money, Jack dropped his voice into the same tone of emphatic awe that he used when he mentioned his home's previous owner, Mona Kent Eddy, the "very famous" author of the radio serial "Portia Faces Life." An hour later Jack returned to the subject of the house and detailed how he'd paid for it. He denounced Hollywood, which had paid little for The Subterraneans, while On the Road's option had lapsed, and was unsold. Popping down beer after beer, Jack explained that he'd only earned about twenty thousand dollars since he'd become famous. The struggle between his loyalty to Memere and his aesthetic needs was never so evident as when Memere joined the conversation and complained, "Everybody says, 'Beat Generation!--He's a juvenile delinquent!' But he's a good boy . . . a good son. He was never any juvenile delinquent. I know, I'm

his mother."

"Yeah," Jack said. "We're Middle Class, we've always been Middle Class. We're Middle Class just like you."

"Oh, I was making good money," she continued later. "We're Middle Class--we've always been that way . . . "

"We're bourgeois," Jack said.

Aronowitz gave Jack a ride into Manhattan that night; Jack left Northport wearing a nice bow tie, as Memere had instructed, and took it off in the first bar.

Whatever Wechsler's implied instructions had been, Aronowitz found himself growing obsessed with his subject, and his original one month's research grew to three. Later he took six months off to write a book about the Beats, but his fanatic commitment to his subjects ruined him as a production writer, and he never managed to get it to a publisher. The Beats destroyed him. He listened when Allen nagged at him to write a book about himself, not someone else, and he actually read a sizable portion of a Ginsberg book list that included Pound, Williams, Whitman, the Bible, the Diamond Sutra, Shakespeare, Christopher Smart, Shelley, Lorca, Spengler, Genet, Wolfe, and much more. He took an emotional pounding when one poet, driven half mad by the publicity, wrote scathing letters that demanded his instant and absolute elimination from the book.

Aronowitz was not always in touch with his subjects. He wanted to talk sex when he interviewed Neal in prison,

and Cassady sprayed him with Kundalini-fire-up-the-spine-to-the-pineal-gland Cayce, then dismissed him as a "pagan." Aronowitz also served as a messenger when Neal asked Jack to send him a typewriter. Jack supplied the money and Allen delivered it to San Quentin; Neal enjoyed the new machine, and wrote his first letter to brother Kerouac in many years. He was bitter: "Giving those three offbrand cigarettes to that cop . . . did finally free me from that ludicrous lifetime job and the even funnier family it supported so I could concentrate entirely on really important things like at which wall to stare in this _____ cell I share with a gunman."

Though Neal thought he was an ignorant pagan, Aronowitz included the metaphysical Cayce lecture and Neal's defense of marijuana in his Post series, the most sensitive of all the journalistic treatments of the Beats. Eighteen years later, "The Beat Book" would still be the center of Aronowitz' life. He could never again be an uninvolved, professional writer, for his vision of free artists had transcended his old concept of journalistic professionalism. Instead, he became a link in a chain; Jack had introduced him to marijuana, and later he and Bob Dylan would do the same for the Beatles. The Beat aesthetic vision turned him inside out for life.[5]

As Aronowitz worked on his book, Jack warned him that the Beats were the greatest American writers since the Tran-

scendentalists. Jack was not the alcoholic fool the media portrayed, but an artist in a sterile, deathly era when young men yearned to be jet pilots rather than magicians, visionaries, seekers after the quest. The epithets piled up on Jack. Truman Capote got off the perfect one-line Kerouac zinger on David Susskind's "Open End" program when he squeaked, "That's not writing, that's typewriting." Trivial, sensationalized articles in his hometown Long Island Newsday depressed Jack just in time to absorb the sickening impact of the Dr. Sax reviews: "Bad taste," "incoherent," "psychopathic fantasy," "stupefying in its unreadability," "Barefoot Boy with Dreams of Zen." Lawrence Lipton, Los Angeles' answer to Rexroth, cashed in on the scene with his corny, egotistical tome, The Holy Barbarians.[6]

Jack struck back. Muttering threats to flee the abuse and move to Florida, he began to write a column for Escapade magazine and accepted the editorship of a three times yearly Beat anthology for the Avon Press. Keeping busy, he read the Diamond Sutra and Casanova, typed up his "Book of Sketches," wrote dozens of letters soliciting everyone's most fantastic and unpublishable material for his anthology, and read an enormous stack of galleys for the flood of books he would publish in the next fifteen months: "Maggie Cassidy," "Tristessa," "Mexico City Blues," "The Scripture of the Golden Eternity," and part of "Visions of Cody." Lord had grabbed quickly at $7,500 paperback

advances for "Tristessa" and "Maggie Cassidy" from Avon. There was no order and little dignity to the sluice of publications, and Jack suffered in the end for it, particularly as he constantly complained that Lord always wanted his "latest adventures." That spring Jack conned Holiday for two thousand dollars on two articles--"The Vanishing American Hobo" and "The Roaming Beatniks"--which he typed up at Gregory and Allen's respective dictation, splitting the proceeds with them so that they could travel again.

The pace was too hectic for Jack, and his drinking accelerated to a quart of whiskey a day. Shy, prudish Jack was unhinged enough to drop his trousers and expose himself at a party on one of his New York binges. Much of his horrified self loathing stemmed from Lowell, where his relatives, he told Phil Whalen, had disowned him as a disgrace to the name of Kerouac. Jack wrote a letter to the Sun about Dr. Sax, conceding that it might well be banned, but that "It's wild . . . It is the completion of the Faust legend, and also a gothic New England with roots in Melville and Hawthorne . . . After Sax, I will never dare to visit Lowell again, but it is my deepest vision of the world, which to me was and still is Lowell."

The twist in his life was complete; just as his emotional life lay tattered, his publishing career had peaked. "Old Angel Midnight" was in the editorial works at

Ferlinghetti's City Lights Press and Pull My Daisy premiered at the Museum of Modern Art, sparking a bar crawl that Jack began with William de Kooning and ended by being ousted from Birdland in the company of jazz drummer Elvin Jones. Jack even went with Gregory Corso to read at Wesleyan University, and enjoyed the small, personal atmosphere.7

Part of the reason Lowell condemned Jack was his column in Escapade. Yet it was no surprise that his work appeared in the "girly magazines." Thanks to two enlightened editors--A. C. Spectcorsky at Playboy and Seymour Krim at Nugget and later Swank--many experimental works saw publication surrounded by a garden of languorous smiles and smooth flesh. Since they had no reputation to lose, the sinful hoydens of the publishing business were perhaps a little more tolerant. Jack's contributions to Escapade were eccentric, often charming, and always spontaneously himself. Entitled "The Last Word," Jack's column began in April of 1959 with an expert if surreal history of "The Beginning of Bop" to test the water. Then in June Jack published a piece on his "position in the current American literary scene," boosting Burroughs, Corso, Ginsberg, and his own unpublished work.

In succeeding columns he defended Ted Williams and attacked baseball's Boudreau shift (which put virtually the

entire team on one side of the field to stop Ted) as "unnatural," taught Buddhism and the Four Noble Truths, berated bullfight fans for their insensitivity to agony, and sorrowfully described the history of the world as "bloody and sad and mad." He pondered foreign policy and sounded like Dean Acheson, and then quirkily and from his heart defended Nikita Khrushchev for wearing a hat while Eisenhower gave a speech, because the sun had been hot. Jack grew used to the column form, and his best columns were his last three, before he quit over the low pay and lack of prestige. An essay on Zen was quite good. "Zen is like having all your mail forwarded to the Dead Letter office," Jack wrote. "Zen is Hegel saying 'Being and nothing are identical.'" The last piece, a segment of "Visions of Cody" that began, "The mad road, lovely," was even better. The article on the future of jazz was best of all, accurately prophesizing the ascension of Ornette Coleman, Don Cherry, and the sainted John Coltrane; for the present, Max Roach was the best percussionist and Thelonious Monk the "greatest composer who ever lived."[8]

Jack was certainly correct in writing off the column as an ineffectual method for answering the critics. Escapade's readers didn't care what Partisan Review critics said, and Partisan Review's audience confined its interest in Escapade to nervous rifflings at the newstand. Still trying to help Neal in San Francisco, Allen had nearly given up,

emotionally torn by the "joyless ambitions" he saw in the local poets and the unrelenting barrage of criticism. New York's intelligentsia continued to dismiss the upstart Beats as insignificant, unruly brats. Alfred Kazin's article in Harper's, Irving Howe's highly publicized "Mass Society and Modern Fiction" in Partisan Review, and John Ciardi's "Epitaph for the Dead Beats" in Saturday Review each deprecated the "Beat rebellion" as a "naked and unashamed plea for 'love.'" The Beats themselves were anti-intellectuals indulging in "unwashed eccentricity."

Critical snobbery reached its apex in Diana Trilling's Partisan Review article, "The Other Night at Columbia," a report on Allen's February 1959 reading at the University's McMillen Theater. Mrs. Trilling had described Edith Wharton as "the aristocrat that all literary artists are, and must be, in spirit," and wrote her attack on Ginsberg from that perspective. Professing astonishment that the audience and poets smelled clean, she dispatched the crowd as "without the promise of masculinity," and the readers as "miserable children trying desperately to manage." The smell of revenge on her oddly impersonal prose, she informed her readers as an insider that Allen had been disturbed since college days, and that he adored her husband Lionel as a father figure, dedicating a "passionate love poem" called "Lion in the Room" to Trilling at the reading. Actually, "A Lion for Real" was about God, death, and the alteration

of consciousness, not romantic love.[9]

Having seen what she wanted to see, Mrs. Trilling laid down a sentence of excommunication. Her sentiments were shared by most of the intellectual press, including Encounter, whose "Portrait of the Beatnik" was a fantasy of hipsters lighting up on "muggles" culled from the pages of Look and Playboy. The American right wing was even more graphic in its contempt; to the National Review, Beat poetry was "a combination of nausea and the stirrings of the urino-genital tract" produced by mass culture weaklings rather than virile individualists. Even "The Playboy Philosophy" dismissed Jack and Allen as irresponsible profligates.

Represented by Professors Richard Hofstadter and Leo Marx, the academic world denounced Kerouac and company as "adolescent," and Doctors Francis Rigney and L. Douglas Smith of the American Orthopsychiatric Association diagnosed the typical beatnik as "a sad, mentally sick individual, who needs the professional help of the psychiatrist." Rigney and Smith's later book, The Real Bohemia, was a classic specimen of statistical flim-flam that divided their tiny sample of fifty North Beach resident "Beats" into seven improbably neat categories: Men were "Tormented Rebels" or "Lonely Ones," women were "Angry" or "Beat Madonnas," both were either "Earnest Artists" or "Passive Prophets," or "Atypical." A local poet suggested, "sorry to say / you miss the point / these things are lived / not

sociologized," but Newsweek and the New York Times ran ponderously impressive articles based on this absurdity.

In fact, the only writers in America who half-defended the new art were Catholic intellectuals. Father Donachie at St. Patrick's Cathedral might attack the Beats for their failure to accept the Church, but articles in America, Cithera, and Catholic World applauded Beat anti-materialism and its sense of morality, although they cringed at its actual application.[10]

Allen and Gregory each had one last reply. In "Poetry, Violence, and the Trembling Lambs," published that summer of 1959 in the Village Voice, Allen argued that "recent history is the record of a vast conspiracy to impose one level of mechanical consciousness on mankind and exterminate all manifestations of that unique part of human sentience, identical in all men, which the individual shares with his Creator. The suppression of contemplative humanity is nearly complete." The new poetry was a "crack in the mass consciousness of America" that illuminated a "nether world of nerve gases, death bombs, bureaucrats, secret police systems . . ." Gregory wrote in his "Variations on a Generation,"

> The Beat Generation is youth quarrels vexation
> American disappointment of a cherished hope, an

enlightenment, a testimonial of honor and distinction.

> The Beat Generation is high, is good omen, is like frog.

Though it was perhaps a good omen for the future, the Beat Generation had to cope with a present day U.S., a nation that in 1959 was firmly convinced of its own rectitude and obsessed with the sins of others. That year the U.S. made an overnight hero of an Army corporal who refused to allow Soviet guards to inspect a convoy travelling from West Berlin to West Germany, and grew nervous about the Cuban revolution ninety miles from its shores. When Nikita Khrushchev made his fall visit, American citizens lined the streets to stare blankly at the Soviet monster. On the whole, Americans preferred to cheer, to salute the seven crew-cut pilots who that fall were selected as astronauts, to glory in the astounding prosperity that had made the American good life possible. Still, there was something wistfully reactionary in the TV networks' decision to retreat to the golden age of cowboys; thirty-two of that year's prime time programs were Westerns.

Few Americans read Partisan Review, Howl, or On the Road, but virtually all of them knew what a beatnik was. The New York intellectual family had established an image for the beatnik, but cartoonists and television script writers made it common knowledge. In the fall of 1959, America's best known beatnik was not Allen or Jack,

but an inept if good hearted waif named Maynard G. Krebs, the co-star of "The Dobie Gillis Show." A Los Angeles anti-beatnik leader had announced that "We're not criticizing their clothing and beards or their way of life, except when it becomes immoral," and Maynard satisfied that sort of mentality perfectly. He was instantly identifiable as a beatnik, since he played bongoes, prefaced every sentence with "Like," and wore sneakers, blue jeans, a sweatshirt, and a goatee.

Since "Dobie Gillis" was a situation comedy, he was as threatening as a lamb. With his shy smile and failures with women, Maynard was the exact expression of the "child" image of the beatnik (versus the threatening evil hipster). He was a dopey goof who became convulsed, whenever the idea of labor was mentioned, with a spasm of eyebulging fear. He was illiterate, stupid, incapable of doing anything of significance, and accident prone. Yet Maynard was also given a child's virtues: Truthfullness, loyalty, generosity, and love. Young viewers adored him.

"Dobie Gillis" had been a popular series of short stories for Max Shulman, but Maynard was created expressly for TV, and the writers defined him in one program's notes: "Maynard discovers Eddie, a girl who dresses, acts, and thinks just as he does. The two spend blissful hours together watching bridges go up, observing sheepdipping in the stockyards, and sneering at their friend's conventional con-

duct." When their friends persuaded them to go to a dance, Eddie dressed up for the event and turned into Pygmalion crossed with Marilyn Monroe, deserting beatdom in a flash. "Sorrowfully she bids farewell to Maynard, assuring him that some day, he, too, will give up his 'way out' attitude and join the human race. Maynard does not agree, and continues to go his merry, erratic way alone."

A few years later television dipped again into the Beats to create a new program by the simple expedient of sanitizing On the Road. Trading in a muddy 1949 Hudson for a gleaming Corvette Sting Ray, Producer Stirling Silliphant took the archetypal freedom image from Jack's book and added George Maharis, an actor who eerily resembled Kerouac, to produce "Route 66." Appalled by the show's violence, Jack asked two lawyers to sue Silliphant for plagiarism, but both concluded that there was insufficient evidence.

Most TV beatniks were criminals, as the villains on detective shows like "San Francisco Beat" rapidly sprouted goatees.[11] In real life 1959, the New York Times headlined "beatnik" drug arrests, although the drug dealers were caught in a "lavish" Central Park West apartment. At the same time, producer Albert Zugsmith unveiled his new film, The Beat Generation, a sleazy B-grade opus of rape and assault. The film was patently a standard plot dressed in goatees and sunglasses for quick publicity,

but Zugsmith assured reporters that he'd written a book by that title two years before, "And we don't actually show them smoking tea, but they act like the typical Beatniks." Music was by the advanced modern trumpeter Louis Armstrong, and the cast included Charles Chaplin Jr. as the lover-boy beatnik, Maxie Rosenbloom as the boxing beatnik, Jackie Coogan as the nutty beatnik, Ray Danton as the rapist beatnik, and Mamie Van Doren as the victim.

Inexhaustibly creative in its methods of exploiting a fad, the American economy repackaged the Beat ideal in a thousand ways. Playboy's "Beat Playmate" ate health food, read Dylan Thomas, and drove a Jaguar. Bookstores sprouted porno paperbacks like Jerry Weil's A Real Cool Cat. There were Beat Generation drinking sweatshirts and Halloween masks. A pop song called "Beatnik Fly" vanished with merciful haste, but 1961's number one song was "Sugar Shack," about the espresso joint where Jimmy Gilmer found a beat chick in leotards to marry. Playboy ran a jingle that read, "Twas the night before Christmas and all through the pad / Not a hip cat was swinging and that's nowhere, dad . . . He laid the jazz down and fled from the gig, / Wailin' 'Have a cool yule and man later, like, dig?'" Mad magazine, America's most popular satirical publication, thought the Beats too "esoteric" to spoof, though Mad did dress Alfred E. Neuman in cool-daddy goatee, beret and hornrims for one of its paperback collections. Beat cartoons were everywhere.

One showed a beatnik sitting disconsolate while his friend groaned to another poet, "Clifton Fadiman called him witty and urbane." "Pogo" had Churchey La Femme, the turtle, read a poem from the Dead Beat Generation accompanied by Pogo on bass drum, and beatniks appeared in the soap opera "Helen Trent" and the comic strip "Popeye."12

Beat art had passed through the media crucible and emerged to a mass reception that was defined by two special pictures, the first a Saturday Evening Post cover and the second a Life photograph. That summer the Saturday Evening Post ran a short story called "Beauty and the Beatnik," a silly tale of a hard working young woman so shocked at the sight of a young man sunbathing on a Monday morning that she proceeded to fall in love with the lazy beatnik. "James Jones. Jack Kerouac," sniffed the bohemian. "They're Dun and Bradstreet compared to me. I'm a real bum!" Of course, the young man was swiftly revealed as a vacationing District Attorney, and everyone lived happily ever after. That issue's cover painting depicted midsummer night lovers under an apple tree, romantically painting sky castles of their future--in the form of washing machines, stoves, and two-car garages. The cover's crassness was a quintessential fulfillment of American philistinism.

As a sidebar to Paul O'Neill's long piece on the Beats,

"The Only Rebellion Around," Life printed a staged photo of the "typical Beatnik pad." The furnishings consisted of a chick in black leotards and a turtleneck, a naked lightbulb, a hot plate, a (phony) marijuana plant, some books in fruit crates, a Hi-Fi, a typewriter and poem, a Charley Parker record, a wine bottle with candle, a guitar and bongoes. In an issue that turned verbal backsprings for the Marine Corps, O'Neill's "Rebellion" essay assailed the "hairiest, scrawniest and most discontented specimens of all time: the improbable rebels of the Beat Generation . . . talkers, loafers, passive little con men, lonely eccentrics, mom-haters, cop haters, exhibitionists . . . writers who cannot write, painters who cannot paint."

O'Neill turned Michael McClure, then working as a gymnasium manager, into a "towel boy," and retold an apocryphal anecdote in which Allen Ginsberg had encouraged Dame Edith Sitwell to shoot heroin. The harangue sourly concluded, "What have we done to deserve this?" Kerouac, McClure, and the rest asked the same question, especially when the article was reprinted for millions in The Reader's Digest.

Long before O'Neill had completed his diatribe, Jack was numb, too battered by the word and picture storm to focus. His greatest gift had come to betray him. The naked innocence of his eye had left him incapable of a saving shield of cynicism, and when he was mocked by the

ignorant and his creation--the term "Beat Generation"--was defiled in the service of violence or corrupt profit, he could only cry, or grind his teeth in rage, or get drunk enough so that the images blurred and softened: There was no forgetting the wasteland.

The fraudulent media image mocked the public as well. Three young ladies from Kansas wrote to Lawrence Lipton and asked him to visit their town of Hutchinson and "cool us in." When Lipton accepted the invitation, the town fathers gibbered and withdrew the welcome, forcing one of the three girls to tell a reporter, "All we did was send a letter. We know beatniks aren't good, but we thought they just dressed sloppy and talked funny. Now we know that they get married without licenses and things like that."[13]

For Jack, the fall of 1959 was gruelingly alcoholic but commercially productive. He sold a section of "Visions of Cody" for December publication in Playboy, convinced Allen to relieve him of the energy-absorbing Avon anthology, and saw Mexico City Blues published by Grove in November. Though later Robert Creeley and Anthony Hecht reviewed it favorably, the Blues' first notice was an essay by Kenneth Rexroth, which appeared in November in the New York Times Book Review. After associating Jack's views on jazz and Negroes with those of the Ku Klux Klan, Rexroth delivered a closing assault:

"I've always wondered what ever happened to those wax work figures in the old rubberneck dives in Chinatown. Now we know; one of them at least writes books."14

Under the debilitating impact of such critical fury, Jack further increased his drinking, which became so uncontrolled that in mid-November he and and an equally besotted Memere lay unconscious in the living room while a visiting Phil Whalen rapped on their door but could not rouse them from their stupor. A week later, Jack was still drunk when he flew to Los Angeles to appear on the Steve Allen show. Sweating and nervous, he cut down to wine for the show itself, and although the Lowell Sun would run indignant columns on his galvanic behavior, he played a subtle, mischievous trick that revealed how he felt about his fame and his public. When Steve asked him to read from On the Road, Jack pulled out a copy and began. Only Allen Ginsberg and John Holmes knew that he was not reading On the Road, but the moving passage of farewell that closed "Visions of Cody" with the words, "Adios, King."

After touring the Subterraneans set at the MGM studio, Jack joined Alfred Leslie and drove to San Francisco, where Pull My Daisy was entered in the International Film Festival. Clad in a red and black hunting shirt, Jack cut an odd figure at the snobbishly elegant post-Festival party, and was unable to find a seat until David Niven made him welcome at his own table. Jack responded to the contempt

with a drunken obstinacy that made him impolitely stagger through the remainder of the Festival before he reeled off to a North Beach long since debauched by publicity and commercialism.

As had Gary and Allen before him, he planned to lecture Neal's prison class on Comparative Religions. At the last moment, Jack collapsed in guilt and liquor, refused to go, and escaped into the bars with Al Sublette. When things began to go blank on him, he sought out his dependable comrade Phil Whalen. Whalen was still on the East Coast, and Jack fell in with two of Phil's roommates, Lew Welch and Albert Saijo. A college classmate of Whalen's, Welch was a mad, hard-drinking Irish poet who'd only recently fled a "career" in a Chicago insurance office. With this charismatic new road partner matching him drink for drink, Jack began to gulp down whiskey with an insatiable intensity that convinced Saijo his love affair with the bottle was a deadly form of penance.

In the midst of their spectacular San Francisco binge, Jack talked an agreeable Welch into driving him home to Northport in Lew's jeep "Willy," and the road madness flared back into reality, cushioned this time by a substantial bankroll for motels, an occasional restaurant, and a transcontinental vista of bars. After stopping in Chinatown for Jack to buy Memere a present, Lew, Albert, and Jack rolled through the night to the Mojave desert, Lew at the wheel

and in charge of the conversation, spouting as relentlessly as Neal about American dialects and literature, sports, logging and ladies.

They skipped the Grand Canyon but took in a Las Vegas replica of George Washington's Mount Vernon, then drove on, interrupting their songs to argue lightly about "politics and politicians, intricate crimes, wars and panics, food, drink, hometowns, travel, movies and movie stars, ghost stories," until the darkness silenced them. Cruising across the Arizona desert, Jack brought them to a sudden halt with a yell from his shotgun seat, then ran back to pull up a small white roadside cross that marked the site of a fatal accident. They agreed that the marker should go to Allen. Their journey careened in and out of bars, and crested when Jack dragged Lew and Albert into an East St. Louis strip show, scattering money like confetti.

In New York, they ate in Chinatown and visited with Jack's old Times Square friend Herbert Huncke, then posed for Village photographer Fred McDarrah's picture book, The Beat Scene. They paid a final tribute to their odyssey at the Cedar Bar and the Five Spot, and came to rest in Northport, where Jack tried to convert Welch to spontaneous prose by showing him how to hook up a paper roll to a typewriter.

As the New Year 1960 began, Jack tried to break the

downhill slide of his life with a new book; he'd had nothing but false starts since The Dharma Bums, two years before. He avoided the city and trained hard with long walks and plenty of sleep, then retired to his newly finished attic to begin "Beat Traveler," his story from 1956 to 1959. On this attempt he was confident of success, because for the first time in years, he had an ample supply of his ever-dependable Benzedrine. The speed crackled through his veins and he paced the attic, his mind crawling with half-memories that did not fuse into a story. Spring flowered, and he continued to pace in the wretched closed circle of the lost. The damp attic aggravated the neuritis in his hands and the phlebitis in his leg; he'd also smashed his elbow during a binge. Lost in tedious depression, he wrote nothing.15

He dreamed of a refuge from the publishing business, and planned trips into the Adirondacks or New England to find land on which to build a hermitage. When literary business did intrude on Northport, it brought more politics and division. When Peter Orlovsky sent him Kenneth Tynan's petition for a "Sane Nuclear Policy," Jack scowled that Tynan was a publicity seeker and possibly a communist, and returned it unsigned. Ferlinghetti visited him in April and they decided that City Lights would publish "Book of Dreams" rather than "Old Angel Midnight." Soon after Ferlinghetti left, a Long Island State Representative attacked

a portion of his poem A Coney Island of the Mind as "anti-Christian." Jack told Larry that the poem was an honest portrayal of Christ as the true hipster, but he squirmed and twisted and mumbled that just for the hell of it--and to silence Jack's police state fears--he should placate the middle class and capitalize "Jesus."

In June 1960, New York firemen shut down two Village coffeehouses and were picketed by the erstwhile customers, who were then swept into a small social war when the Village's old-time Italian residents began to drop waterbags and sometimes rocks on passing inter-racial couples. By the fall of 1960, Actor's Equity and the Police had forced poetry out of the remaining coffee houses, which turned to presenting the more genteel mode of folk music. Beats began to move into the cheaper Lower East Side to avoid the tourists and police of the Village proper.16

Gutted by what critic Ralph Gleason identified as "too much publicity and too many amateurs," North Beach had also become a cheap tourist trap. Cassandra, once a hip bar, now sold rock and roll records. The Place was an art goods shop, the bar called the Co-Existence Bagel Shop sold sandals and jewelery, and the Jazz Cellar had closed. Vesuvio's was a tourist bar, and its owner Henri Lenoir had added an extra attraction; he hired Hube "the Cube" Leslie to sit in the window for the tourists to stare at. Paddy O'Sullivan, who had once marched the Beach's Columbus

Avenue selling his poetry broadsides clad in full beard, cape, and plumed hat, had now shaved and donned a three-piece pinstripe suit, homburg and cane.

North Beach had been destroyed as a hip community by sickly commerce and by the police, who in January carried out mass marijuana raids. The authorities were spearheaded by Officer William Bigarini, who harassed inter-racial couples and systematically provoked poet Bob Kauffman, a black man and old friend of Jack's, until Kauffman had to flee the city. So did many poets and much of the audience. Neal Cassady's release was that spring's only good news. Cheered by his release and relieved that Carolyn wasn't going to divorce him, Jack wrote the Cassadys for the first time in a long while.

In New York the sign of the times was a classified advertisement in the Village Voice: "Rent a Genuine Beatnik." Guaranteed to come equipped with beard, bongoes, shades, turtleneck and acceptably raffish manners at twenty-five dollars a crack, the human puppets were a brief vogue at Long Island society parties.

In June, Jack sat wincing at the premiere of the movie The Subterraneans. The sound of Andre Previn's strings macerating the jazz of Gerry Mulligan and Art Pepper opened the film and served to warn Jack instantly that something was terribly wrong with this cinematic reproduction of his work. Jack was portrayed by a WASPish George Peppard,

whose bland performance seemed colored by a diet of white bread and mayonnaise. Jack's mother began to harass him about getting a job, and one of Jack's first furious retorts to her nagging exposed the utter flatness of the script: "I want every bit of life my brain and body can hold."

Life, it was understood, was sought in North Beach, where Peppard drove his convertible until it was surrounded at a streetcorner by a gaggle of wild-eyed subterraneans led by Gregory, played by Roddy McDowell. Kidnapped to a bar called "Daddy's Catacombs," Peppard met Ailene Lee, a role improbably filled by Leslie Caron. In Caron's previous film she had been the gamin Gigi, and she somehow managed to transport Gay 90s coquettry into North Beach. It was not only that she was the wrong race for the part; Caron was simply the wrong actress.

Five minutes after meeting her, Peppard was busily defending her honor with a beer bottle in his hand, and that suggested act of violence alone churned Jack's sensitivities into a raw wound. Bitter curiosity kept him in his seat as comedian Arte Johnson did a neatly funny job as Gore Vidal, although the director totally distorted the reality of North Beach bars with a melodramatic scene of spotlight tricks played over a club more like Las Vegas than Columbus Avenue. In a plot device invented for the film, Peppard began to flirt with Roxanne, an exotic dancer. Caron reacted with a traditional fit of jealousy, sweeping

him off to her posh pad where they danced with the passion of skim milk and awoke fully clothed the next morning.

As in real life, the cinematic Jack romanced Ailene in between her visits to the psychiatrist, but after Ailene's cataclysmic personality, Caron's neuroses were the peccadilloes of a spoiled child. Falling into Peppard's arms after he told her, "You cook, I'll write," Caron recounted in a bowdlerized fashion the story of her naked walk on the fence, ending it for the film not in high epiphany but at the local Mission. Jealous of Gregory and Ailene, Jack fell apart in Hollywood's time tested, fists and whiskey manner; he got drunk and threatened to break Gregory's arm. Confused, Peppard tried to take up with Roxanne, only to be rejected with the explanation, "You're a whirlpool, [Jack], and I don't want to drown."

Retracing the trite pathways of Hollywood's favorite plot, Peppard returned to Caron, dodged when she threw a knife at him, and melted her with words of love that allowed them to slide into the obligatory clinch as the credits rolled by.[17]

The film was almost too absurdly ugly to grasp, and Jack cringed in revulsion. Afterwards he returned to Northport and reached for the comfort of a bottle of wine. Presently the depression lifted, his internal guilt demons paralyzed and silent, the critics and Memere and Gerard and all his terrors momentarily far away. He drank on.

The wine made him free and funny for a while, his body sweetly alive, the rich liquid running into his belly like an electric transfusion and a sedative all at once.

He drank and drank and drank.

C H A P T E R X V

COLLAPSE

I'd rather die than be famous,
I want to go live in the desert . . .
Jack Kerouac

Two months after the film opened, Jack's wine-soaked panic carried him all the way across the country to San Francisco's skid row Mars Hotel, where he awoke one summer day to stare into a cloudy mirror at his face, a mask riven by anguish and corruscated by alcohol. Salvador Dali had once thought him more handsome than Marlon Brando, but now Jack saw himself as "so ugly, so lost." It was Monday, July 25, 1960, and he was a long way down the road from idealism or joy or anything worthy of pursuit.

As Jack had grown increasingly desperate that summer, Ferlinghetti had offered him a refuge at his cabin in Bixby Canyon, on the California coast near Big Sur. In the peace of the Sur woods, Jack figured, he could take a stand against the nausea that threatened to destroy him, get back into physical shape by chopping wood, and ease his mind with the therapeutic rhythm of the waves. But instead of meeting Ferlinghetti in secret for the ride to the cabin, Jack made a drunkenly theatrical entrance into City Lights Bookstore on Saturday night. Then he whirled dizzily into a weekend drunk with Philip Whalen and painter Robert Lavigne. As Jack stared into the mirror on the Monday after that weekend

toot, he was excrutiatingly hung over and without a ride, since Ferlinghetti had given up trying to awaken him and had gone ahead to the cabin. Jack moaned wordlessly as he turned away from his image in the foggy glass to survey a vista of empty white port bottles and cigarette butts, then thought, "One fast move or I'm gone."

He had been floundering all year, in part because the brave new incoming decade had a zeitgeist even more hostile to him than the sterility of the previous twenty years. Nineteen-sixty marked the gathering of a cool and energetic mood in American youth that sloughed off Eisenhower for John F. Kennedy. Norman Mailer's metaphor was apt: "Kennedy has a jewel of a political machine. It is as good as a crack Notre Dame team, all discipline and savvy and go-go-go, sound, drilled, never dull, quick as a knife." In an era of gogogo, Jack was, as Allen put it, a "shy drunken Catholic Bodhisattva," sensitive enough to perceive the winds of change, but far too bruised to adapt to an era which headlined the loss of a U-2 spy plane over the Soviet Union and the capture of Nazi butcher Adolph Eichmann by the Israelis. John Kennedy's Ivy League technicians were about to accede to the White House, and the peculiarly youthful enthusiasm stilled by Republicanism had found a new champion. A few lonely idealists talked of Adlai Stevenson's intellect and honesty, but when Kennedy's

crack team steamrollered Adlai Stevenson in the Democratic Party Convention in Los Angeles, American youth went wild for Jack and Jacky Kennedy. Had he voted, Jack Kerouac would have chosen Richard Nixon.

Essentially, Jack had nothing to do in the spring of 1960 but drink and quarrel with Memere. Dodie Mueller had loved an all-out two-day bash, but Jack's binges easily stretched to a week. Bit by bit, her patient affection wore away, and by spring their affair was finished. In the wake of his loss, Jack's first reaction was an old one. Once again he set off to search for a wilderness hut, but when he visited one in Pennsylvania, his wallet was stolen and he found himself stranded penniless in the back woods of the Pocono Mountains. His holy Scripture of the Golden Eternity was published that spring, but its pure message was so foreign to his profane mood that the event only accentuated his guilt over his sad condition. His other publications for the year were old--"October in the Railroad Earth" in Evergreen--or casual Holiday travel essays. In June he worked on the galleys for a collection of his travel articles to be called "Lonesome Traveler," and that was the extent of his labor for the year. With no meaningful work to occupy his mind, the whipsaw tension between his perceptivity and his claustrophobic living situation sent him veering out of control, and he drank even harder.[1]

Yet even drunk, there was a majesty and a wit to his

pain. That March, Jack had collapsed in laughter as he told his old friend, "Ginsberg, you're nothing but a hairy loss." Allen was annoyed, but years later he understood that Jack had spoken in an enlightened sense, from a vision of the grave. In the Buddhist Way, everyone was illusion, loss; "All live is suffering." Jack was now utterly dis-illusioned, stripped naked of the brave vanities of his ambitious youth. All that remained to him was a fierce loyalty to Memere--"I don't want to throw my mother to the dogs of eternity like you did, Allen"--and his drinking. The atomic glare of fame had consumed so much of his identity that he needed these two final crutches.

He was stricken with his first attack of delirium tremens in May, after a spectacular Manhattan bender that ended only when he had spent every cent, and had to borrow his train fare home from Peter Orlovsky. Once Dodie had kept his return tickets for him, but no longer.

Jack felt as if he were being strangely martyred, and he reached out to Allen, who was retracing Burroughs' expedition in search of "Yage," the South American psychedelic vine. On June 6 Allen replied with a letter that urged Jack to run down the street to the nearest airport and fly to Peru, where "I wish you were here and we could apocalipsize over jungles together and visit strange Indian tribes." That night Allen ate of the Yage vine, and perhaps in some incredible empathy with Jack's sad fate, felt "What I thought was the

great Being, or some sense of It, approaching my mind like a big wet vagina." "Then the whole fucking cosmos broke loose around me," Allen told Burroughs, "I think the strongest and worst I've ever had it nearly."

Waves of death fear and nausea tormented Allen; he saw snakes wiggling after him out of his own vomit, and felt like a "completely lost strayed soul." As he put it in his Yage poem "Magic Psalm," "Drive me crazy, God I'm ready for disintegration of my mind, / disgrace me in the eye of the earth, attack my hairy heart with terror . . . devour my brain, One flow of endless consciousness, I'm scared." "The Reply" was the next poem in the sequence: "God answers with my doom. I am annulled . . . change[d] from Allen to a skull." His life long struggle for a cosmic identity had ended in the frightening visage of a skeleton, and Allen appealed in panic to Burroughs. Bill tried to soothe him, but Allen's eyes had the look of a man who faced extinction. The Yage death experience and his earlier Blake visions had established poles in his life he could not yet span, and it would be three years before he was again tranquil.[2]

Indian shamans in the jungle were not Jack's idea of peace, and it turned out to be Ferlinghetti who was able to answer his plea for help, when early in July he invited Jack to stay at his cabin in Bixby Canyon. The premiere of The Subterraneans and the publication of Tristessa had

left Jack with stomach cramps, diarrhea, nightmares, and insomnia, and he scrambled to accept Ferlinghetti's kind offer. He swore that his sanity was on the line.

Once more Jack packed his rucksack with the St. Christopher medal on its flap, but this time his "road" was a private roomette on the crack Chicago-San Francisco express train, the California Zephyr. Quietly watching the land roll past, Jack thought wistfully of all the kids who were sure that he was a laughing young man hitchin' on down the road. He was nearing forty, a little fat, and very tired.

When Jack awoke in the Mars Hotel on the Monday--July 25, 1960--after his arrival in San Francisco, Phil Whalen lay asleep on the floor. Jack was close to Whalen, in part because Phil never criticized his drinking, and while Jack was still clear they managed a few hours' peaceful conversation by the waterfront. Their tranquil afternoon made Phil hopeful that Jack might yet be all right. Sickened by the skid row room and the state of his life, Jack thought otherwise, grabbed his rucksack, and headed for Bixby Canyon.

He rode a bus to Monterey, where he hired a cab that brought him at three in the morning to the Canyon's entrance, a gate just off U.S. Highway One many hundred feet above the ocean. All of Jack's prior journeys along the California coast had been inland, and he'd never seen the awesome cliffs

and narrow valleys of the Big Sur region, whose only road, Highway One, was like a thin thread wriggling lightly against the mountainside, fragile somehow, occasionally running over a delicate bridge set above a chasm a thousand feet deep. The coastal mountain range acted as a barrier against the ocean wind, trapping its moisture in the fog that often enshrouded the highway. It was Druidic country, mysterious, beautiful, and sometimes ominously frightening. It was surely no place to first confront in the dead of night after anticipating a charming Eden.

Jack flashed his railroad lantern around, but the misty darkness swallowed up its light, and he became disoriented by what he called the "aerial roaring mystery in the dark." As he inched down the steep corkscrew road that ran from the highway to the canyon floor, Jack was confused by the roar of the surf, which seemed to come from the wrong direction. The shadows that played at the edge of his flashlight beam made him think of rattlesnakes, and his panic made the creek's merry babble sound like the roar of a holocaust. Safe at last on level earth at the bottom of the canyon, he unrolled his sleeping bag by the creek and dropped off into an uneasy doze.

Even in daylight, the canyon--a narrow crack in the coast range of mountains--was imposing. At one end a slight optical illusion made the ocean seem higher than the land, its giant black sentry rocks like the rotted teeth of a monster.

The mountain at the land end reminded Jack of a dream he'd had in February, which he called "The Flying Horses of Mien Mo." The dream had been set in his peacefully creative Mexico, where he had stared at a gigantic mountain topped with palaces and temples and encircled by thousands of winged, caped, inexpressibly sinful horses. In his dream Jack failed to convince the local Indians of the evil nature of the Mountain, but alone in California, he needed no encouragement to sense Satan about him. Arching over the whole of Bixby Canyon was a bridge so far away that it seemed like a bird, a grim metal egg below it, a car that had driven off the highway and tumbled into a rusty wreck on the boulders at the foot of the cliff.

However nervous he was, Jack was now sober, alone at last in his bhikku cabin. For the next three weeks he settled into Ferlinghetti's shack, reading Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde in the liquid glow of a kerosene lamp. The cabin served him well as a haven, even on the night a bat blundered in as he sat mending his leaky old sleepingbag. The thick summer fog discouraged the other canyon landowners from visiting their property, and Jack was entirely alone. Night after night he took his railroad lantern and walked to the water's edge, where he sat crosslegged with a Camel cigarette in his mouth and worked on a poem called "Sea," trying as he had in "Old Angel Midnight" to record universal sound.

During the day he prayed for peace to the kettledrum

and fife tunes of the creek, striving to transcend his fear, to "keep concentrated on the fact," as he later wrote, "that after all this whole surface of the world as we know it now will be covered with the silt of a billion years in time." Jack wound down now, stretched out by the creek in dreamy Proustian recall and building--like "Nick Adams" in Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River"--a mill race in the creek. He made friends with Alf, the local burro, and even began to laugh again. A satisfying hike brought him to a nearby valley that was an Arden of mighty redwood trees and lovely ferns, and he strolled in peace.

Periodically, his horror of life would crack through, and the dry swirl of leaves gathered by the wind would make him think, "Oh my God, we're all being swept away to sea no matter what we say or do." Boredom plagued him, but he repeated Emerson's dictums on "Self Reliance," listened to the sea, cherished the butterflies and fed the raccoons, birds, and mice. Meditating on the superior utility of a ten-cent dish scrubber over the fancy trousers he'd bought for the Steve Allen show, Jack persevered, grimly childlike, on the path of simplicity.

Three weeks after his retreat, he walked up to the highway to mail letters to Lucien and Memere. When he returned to the beach, he sucked in a huge breath of fresh ocean air, and inexplicably became clutched with panic, left vulnerable and childlike by a tidal wave of fear that dwarfed his life.

Like some hideous crone, the sea seemed to shriek at him to end his struggles and die: "GO TO YOUR DESIRE DON'T HANG AROUND HERE."[3] Devastated by a sense of utter meaninglessness, Jack gave up for the moment and set out for the safe ruin of the drunken sociable city. The journey to San Francisco was a 1960 road nightmare of station wagons filled with sanitized, Sanforized, plastic covered P.T.A. families who would never think to help out a woebegone hitchhiker.

Children screamed at him, and their mothers hid behind what he called "sneering dark glasses." Their potbellied, neatly dressed husbands, whom Jack suspected would rather be out getting dirty by a campfire somewhere, pretended not to see him as he shuffled along. America's most famous hitchhiker was forced to walk almost the whole of the fourteen miles from Bixby Canyon to Monterey, as the August-hot pavement cooked his feet into blisters. At last a kindly trucker took him to the Monterey bus station, and Jack rode back to San Francisco. After a night's sleep in a skid row hotel, he strolled into City Lights Bookstore to be dealt a second blow.

Sitting before Ferlinghetti's roll top desk as once he'd perched at Leo's, he read a letter from Memere: "I really don't know how to tell you this but Brace up Honey. I'm going through hell myself. Little Tyke [their kitten] is <u>gone</u> . . . he started belching and throwing up. I went to him and tried to fix him up but to no <u>availe</u>. He was shivering like he was cold so I rapped him up in a Blanket

then he started to throw up all over me. And that was the last of him." Jack was well aware that he was "a little dotty" about cats, that deep in his mind he'd connected them with Gerard, Memere, angels and purity, but his self-knowledge had never really affected his emotions.

Shaken, he left City Lights with Phil Whalen for a few beers at Mike's Pool Hall. They went to Washington Square Park and relaxed in the sun, gabbing easily about everything and nothing as Jack interjected speculations about the consciousness and futures of the passers-by. Sympathetic and firm, Whalen was a shy, blushing Buddha, the rarest of friends, who comforted Jack by not grasping at him.

The sun set and Jack's night fever bloomed. He went to Vesuvio's and began to throw down double bourbons, then called up Lew Welch, his wild drinking partner from the previous fall. Minutes later Lew swept up Columbus Avenue in Willy the Jeep, accompanied by an audience for Jack, a young friend of his named Paul Smith. Cashing five hundred dollars in traveler's checks, Jack was once again party King of the Beats, Willy's swaying shotgun seat his throne, a bottle of Pernod his mace. They called Neal, then tore off on a crashing ride to Los Gatos, past the cookie cutter tract homes that had sprouted on the beet fields of his brakeman days.

Drunk and rude, Jack pushed Carolyn away as he entered her home, his eyes only for Neal, who sat at the chess board

by the fireplace. Still worried about how On the Road might have affected his brother, Jack encouraged himself with the thought that Cassady seemed radiantly patient, not bitter. Desperately optimistic in his later account of their meeting, Jack even managed to convince himself that prison had benefitted Neal by giving him an opportunity to grow spiritually. Jack tried to explain why he had failed to give the San Quentin religion lecture the previous December, and Neal was magnanimous, though this son of a wino disapproved of heavy drinking. Their conversation sputtered and fizzled, distracted by a noisily adoring audience, and Jack and Neal had no chance to be intimate.

The gang went along to keep Neal company at his tire recapping job, awestruck as he manically explained his work while flinging tires in every direction. Then they rushed back to San Francisco, where the King of the Beats had to endure On the Road over the city's incredible hills; Jack had mentioned that Lew and Neal were the best drivers in the world, and one of Lew's neighbors set out to prove himself "Dean Moriarity's" equal. Dawn broke on a terrified Jack Kerouac firmly in the front seat of fame.

During a quiet period in all the lunacy, Jack and Lew drove to a TB sanitorium to visit Albert Saijo, their comrade of the previous fall. Albert was tired and gloomy,

and though he clowned with Jack as they said goodbye, the visit was a disturbing memory that Jack swiftly exterminated with a drink. Jack already had more pain than he could handle, and illness in others unnerved him. The next morning, he picked up a copy of Boswell's Johnson to escape his hangover. Years before he'd told a Navy psychiatrist of his identification with the great man of letters, and since then he'd played Boswell to Neal's Dr. Sam; the book usually had the sugary perfection of an Easter egg scene for him. All that he found in Boswell this day were reminders of death, and he began to tremble in a phantasmic attack of fear that was cut off by a telephone call from Neal, who had just lost his job and needed to borrow a hundred dollars for the rent. Jack promised to deliver the funds immediately, and asked Lew and his woman friend Lenore Kandel to drive him down to Los Gatos.[4]

It was a weekend, and by the time they left San Francisco, they had organized a giant party in Bixby Canyon. On their way they put Phil Whalen and Paul Smith in Willy's back seat and added a second jeep with Ferlinghetti and his friend Victor Wong. After a pizza feast in Los Gatos, first Neal and then Michael McClure and his family joined them to form a four car caravan that wound down Highway One to Bixby. Everyone enjoyed the night's party, which came alive in mad talk around a huge bonfire on the beach. Jack had stopped eating, and kept a secure grip on his wine jug as he shouted

pleasantly with Neal, then read from his ocean poem "Sea," while McClure recited his poem "Dark Brown" and Larry and Phil swapped stories. Later Jack read aloud from Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde, and McClure was deeply moved. "It was at moments like that," McClure later said, "that I began to understand his genius." Jack "eulogized" writers in his conversation and denounced the poets when they began to play the game of "Have you read such and such?" "This is intellectual mutual masturbation," Jack shouted, and urged them instead to "Deliver your information, don't ask a put-down question."

Now that it was nearly fall, the prevailing winds blew off shore, out of a clear and fogless sky. Jack had earlier taken comfort in Bixby's soft gray cloak of fog, and he grew uneasy when the autumn wind roared down the throat of the canyon so intensely that he could no longer hear the creek. The noise and the wine kept Jack awake, and he spent most of the night frantically jabbering with Ferlinghetti's friend Victor Wong, somehow afraid that he'd miss something if he slept. The goblins of paranoia were catching at his heels, and when the men visited the Big Sur mineral baths the next day, Jack imagined that he saw sperm floating in the water, wrigglers out to bite him.

Everyone returned home the next day except Paul Smith, who begged to stay with his hero. Jack was too far gone to deny him, even though Paul's youthful enthusiasm depressed

the worn-out King of the Beats, reminding him of the boys who had once visited him in Northport wearing high school letter jackets emblazoned with "The Dharma Bums." His last bottle of white port safe in his grasp, Jack managed for his admirer to produce one night's performance as King. But Jack awoke to an empty bottle, and began to come unglued with the torture of alcoholic withdrawal. The anguish was so fierce that he felt as if he'd betrayed his own birth and was now being crucified by cancers that dissolved his face, loathsome and unclean. At last he broke down and asked, "O mon Dieux, pourquoi Tu m'laisse faire malade comme ca--Papa, Papa aide mue (Dear God, why do you torture me this way, Father, Father help me)," groaning exactly the way Leo had, fourteen long years before.

When Paul left Bixby to visit McClure in Santa Cruz, Jack was able to regain his self-control in domestic solitude: He chopped wood, sewed, and read an old Evergreen. In the moonlight the canyon looked like a beautiful Chinese scroll painting to him, and he celebrated it with a ditty that ran, "Man is a busy little animal, a wise little animal, his thoughts about everything don't amount to shit."[5]

McClure visited him the next day, and they sat within the dark cabin talking about poetry and Michael's heroes Billy the Kid and Jean Harlow. Suddenly the door crashed open, flooding them with sunlight and the startlingly golden sight of the blond Cassady family, which had secretly come to visit

Uncle Jack. Peering at them out of the gloom, Jack yelped, "A band of angels, with St. Michael at the head!" Inexpressibly pleased with this treat, Jack shared a joint with Neal, and later sat on the beach talking quietly with Carolyn. It was as if they hadn't seen each other in many years. She asked him if he still wrote, if he still carried his little pocket notebooks, and he had to admit that he hadn't written prose in years, and frequently forgot his pencil and paper. "I don't like On the Road or Subterraneans," she continued, "they're not like you. Jack, remember that Dickensian Christmas story you wrote for me once? That's you."

"Yeah well," Jack replied, "when we went to the hot springs, Neal and I were the only ones who weren't naked . . . the only modest ones in the bunch."

Sweetly protective, Carolyn tried to convince Jack to come and spend some quiet time in Los Gatos. He nodded "yeah, yeah," and accompanied them to the town, but that night, when he and Neal were supposed to attend a play for which Carolyn had designed the sets, they conspired to leave early. Soon they were hurtling down the road, brothers once more in a car about to leap into heaven or at least the dark cosmos, mentally back in 1949 as a frantic Neal described his new girlfriend Jacky, whom he wanted to share with his brother Jack. Yet in 1960 Jack realized with a faint shock that each man had grown to resemble the other's father--Neal with his bluster and hurry and racing forms, Jack with his

wine--and their old energy had vanished.

Jack had planned to return to Los Gatos after meeting Jacky, but she eerily resembled Lucien in her blond beauty, and there was something in the sad catch of her voice that entranced him. He plopped down into the center chair of her living room, took a sip of white port, and began to talk with her. After Neal left, they fell excitedly into bed, and momentarily Jack found his dead loneliness displaced by the nervous exaltation of a new affair. It wouldn't last long, since most of her conversation was California-Metaphysical, a revolving series of channels, evolution, planes, planets, and karma. Jack couldn't stomach that talk from Neal, much less anyone else, but he sat in her chair, sipped his wine, called her Lucien, and listened.

Absorbed in the broken-hearted timbre of Jacky's voice, Jack stayed in the chair for a week, leaving only rarely to go out with Neal and Jacky's weird strongarm prison friends who hustled him for meals, or to Jacky's bed, where they made love as her one year old son watched. Both activities began to split Jack's mind into paranoid splinters. Things blurred and made less and less sense, and he began to think that only plots and schemes and intricate conspiracies could define this reality. Ferlinghetti, McClure, and Whalen came to visit, but Jack remained in the chair, pouring down endless quarts of wine as his money ran out and his bloodshot eyes began to signal the approach of something horrible.

Philip Whalen managed to drag him out for a quiet afternoon in Washington Square Park, where Jack dozed in the sunshine while Phil kept watch. After he awoke, Phil chided his worries of going crazy with the comment, "You said that to me in 1955," and added, "Stop thinking about yourself, will ya, and float with the world." Trembling, Jack leaned on Whalen as they walked back towards Jacky's place. When he watched Phil saunter away while he waited for Jacky to return from work, his serenity vanished. He clutched at the window curtain like Lon Chaney in the Phantom of the Opera, too confused and too Catholic to float as Whalen had suggested. Instead he ravished himself, guilty, he said, "for being a member of the human race," for being a foolish drunkard in a slimy world of crooked judges and a deathly war machine.

When Jacky cooked supper that night, Jack looked up and saw her son waiting, spoon in hand, for his dinner. Children and kitchens and domestic bliss were for someone else, he thought, someone normal and responsible, and his adrenalin tripped off the soft interior explosions of panic. His fears came to rest on the little boy, and everything somehow made sense when he concluded the the child was actually Satan. That night Jack slumped heavily back into his chair after supper, and it collapsed into several pieces under him. As he picked them up, he noticed that the two goldfish in the bowl next to the chair were dead, strangled in a week's solid

cloud of Camel cigarette smoke. The omens piled up until Jack's fear overcame his dull sense of futility, and he suggested that they escape to Ferlinghetti's cabin. Call Lew Welch, get him to snatch up his woman friend Lenore and the five of them would run away to peace and quiet. L'es go L'es go L'es go!

To the tune of "Home on the Range" and "Red River Valley," they flew down the road to Bixby Canyon, with a sad, stupid visit to Los Gatos; Jack had said that he wanted to pick up some clothing, but actually he'd plotted for Carolyn to meet Jacky. After thirteen years of "infidelity" from her husband, Carolyn wasn't too disturbed, but Neal was stiff with jealousy over Jack and Jacky's romance, and furious that his secrets were exposed. Jack sobered enough to realize what an ass he'd been, and mentally ran away and hid, feeling like a ghost, a stranger forever passing through but never fully in touch with anyone.

As his body, cell by cell, began to demand more alcohol the next morning, Jack realized that the nearest wine was thirteen hard miles away and fell apart. The autumn wind was a prolonged scream that ripped the leaves off the trees to dance and fly and swirl, and his mind followed the wind. His hands trembled so badly that he couldn't light the fire. Jacky's son kept whining and asking

questions that bored into Jack's miniscule patience like a woodpecker stabbing into his brain, as Jack sat and shook, waiting for Lew's return with supplies. Sitting with his back to a boulder, Jack watched Jacky walk along the water and gloomily pondered the fact that he didn't love her, and worried that he was leading her on. His thoughts crashed and banged inside his skull, his mind in a whirl as he briefly contemplated suicide. All he could be sure of was that he was tired, exhausted, his eyes on fire. He and Jacky began to talk, but her calm attempts to help him had to filter through a mental screen of paranoia. Jack decided that she was witching him. The boy kept crying and pulling at his mother, until she began to beat him, crying herself and horrifying Jack until all three of them sobbed in a hideous mess.

At dusk Jack and Jacky tried to make love, but the boy kept tugging at his mother's shoulder and the creepiness of it got on Jack's mind. Periodically Jack rushed to the creek to cleanse himself with a drink of water, but the clear skies had brought tourists. To Jack, the Brownie-toting visitors seemed to harass him with their eyes, and as the moon rose he began to mumble to himself that they had poured kerosene into the creek. Lew returned from fishing, and cheerfully began to divert Jack with a lecture on how to clean fish. But he was too cheerful, and only turned Jack back in on himself, a weary flop "devoid of human beingness."

The idea of eating Lew's fish seemed hypocritical, and Jack began to talk about cutting off their planned week-long stay to return to San Francisco. Lew was disappointed, which further depressed Jack, failure folding in on failure until his mind was buried like a fleck of popcorn in a sea of mud.[6]

Reality slipped and Jack tipped over into a full, unhinged breakdown. While Lew cooked dinner Jack spookily raced from the cabin to the creek and back, fearful in the shadows, wanting only to scream while Lew talked bravely on and Lenore tried to get Jack to eat a little something, a piece of tomato or an hors d'oeuvre. Except that he decided it was poisoned, that his eyes were dilated as if drugged, and after picking at his food he bolted back to the creek in what he later described as an "automatic directionless circle of anxiety, back and forth, around and around." As his friends huddled to talk about his bizarre behavior, his mind flowered with hallucinations--at Neal's instigation, they were plotting to poison him after he married Jacky, then share his money.

His attention slid away and the creek babble filled his head, swarmed over his mind, raped him, wouldn't stop, crushed his skull in a vice of noise, kept on, until he stood paralyzed under the menacing full moon and screamed at his mind to "STOP IT! STOP THAT BABBLING!" He tried to sleep with Jacky but the cot collapsed and the sleeping bag was too hot and a mosquito tortured him and his eyes bulged

the way Humphrey Bogart's had as the mad Fred C. Dobbs in The Treasure of the Sierra Madre. He gave up and lay alone in a corner and cried out for Memere and Tyke the cat, raved that Lew and the gang were communists, and then sank into a series of internal dream voices that went on, unstoppable, for hours. In the hideously bright light of the moon he dreamed of angels and devils. Bathed in cold sweat, his body rigid with tension, he saw the Cross . . . then devils, then the Cross, Saxian trolls in struggle with Gerard's true pure Cross until he fell into a halfawake nightmare of snow and ice, a God Monster Machine, fornicating vultures, dough face people, and a place of puke and slime and filth.

The morning's bright glare only made him feel worse, and Jack demanded that they return immediately to San Francisco, where he distressed even Whalen by abusing old friends in an ugly frenzy. He stayed at Ferlinghetti's for two days and dried out a little, ignored Larry's advice to enter a sanitarium, and avoided Neal. On September 7 he jumped on a New York bound jet and returned to his Northport monastery, the Reverend Mother Gabrielle presiding.

For the moment, he told Phil, his desperate panic was behind him and his breakdown seemed like a satori: He was only drinking burgundy now. In mid-September he received a letter from Allen, who reported that "I took a lot more

[Yage] and realized I AM that emptiness that's movie-projecting Kali monster on my mind screen . . . So not scared any more. But I still can't stop the appearance [of the monster] . . . I'll have to study yoga or something finally."[7]

It was much too late for anything so creative for Jack. Good art and perceptiveness were in him yet, but no balance now, no peace: Only thirst.

CHAPTER XVI

"WAITING FOR SOMETHING"

God help us, refugees in winter dress,
skating home on thin ice from the apocalypse.
Verandah Porche

Soon after his return to Northport, Jack made himself a present of the old 11th edition of the Encyclopedia Brittanica, which he'd coveted since he'd plundered it in Neal's attic. The delicate antiquity of its articles on Rousseau and mysticism nurtured him through a quietly bittersweet fall. In what had become a ritual of compensation for some ancient loss, he continued to search for a country cabin, but his grail was an evanescent state of mind called security, and as such was not to be found.

One of his desires was fulfilled in December, when City Lights published his dream journals. It had not been an easy process. When Ferlinghetti had produced a broadside of Jack's poem "Rimbaud" earlier in the year, Jack had complicated matters tremendously with a last second demand that the lines of the poem conform to their original shape in his notebook. Dogmatic absolutism about his work was not new to him, but now he went further to explain that he was a channel of God, his writing a scripture; unfazed, Ferlinghetti was still eager to publish a full book.

Jack tried to include Phil Whalen as an editor, but finally had to select the dreams himself, and just before

Christmas, Book of Dreams laid his naked subconscious before the public. It was a frightening work, perfect in its dreamy lack of discrimination, yet horrible in its portrait, as he had written, of the "selfhood of death--the fruits of self at last and the pain and terror of it." In the dead hours before dawn, Jack had visions of his own body rotting away, of his childhood baseball games turned into riots, of the mortal shame incurred by the theft of five dollars from his uncle's body. In his sleep he was a child chased endlessly by grownups through a world of yellow puke and bloody brawls, H-bombs, mistakes, frustration and despair. Jack's night world was permeated with the hovering presence of Memere, who always blocked him from sex and good times, and the demonic shadows of Lowell. Sweet repose was a holocaust that made him wake up screaming, "Jesus, pourquoi tu'm maitre des portraits comme ca?" [Jesus, why do you make me see images like this?] Yet Book of Dreams was also an act of faith, a statement that dreaming "ties all mankind together," Jack thought, "in one unspoken Union and also proves that the world is really transcendental which the Communists do not believe."

Jack plunged further into his subconscious in January, 1961, when he participated in Dr. Timothy Leary's Harvard psychedelic experiments. Intrigued with the idea of artists as research subjects, Leary had administered psilocybin to Allen Ginsberg in late November, and although Allen began

with a roiling stomach and low spirits, he soared into ecstasy, ready to walk naked through the Cambridge streets preaching love and peace. Leary convinced him to stay indoors, so Allen decided to call up Khrushchev, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Mao, Mailer, Burroughs, and Kerouac and solve the world's problems. He settled for Jack, demanding that Kerouac rush to Cambridge.

A few weeks later, Jack's drug experience was memorable for two bemused comments from him: "I think I'll take a shit out the window at the moon" and "Walking on water wasn't built in a day." Also, it briefly stopped his drinking. Impressed with the drug's therapeutic potential, Jack wrote a friendly report for Leary, whom he had nicknamed "Coach." When the doctor later evolved into a cult figure, Jack disavowed him and his magic pills.[1]

The psilocybin experience blocked his alcohol cravings for only a week, and in the dregs of winter Jack consumed Christian Brothers Tawny Port and then whiskey until he was, he told Whalen, a warped and ugly demon. For the first time, viciousness became part of his character. Allen visited him and Memere early in February, and after a generally pleasant meal, they watched an old movie about Hitler on television. As the swastikas danced across the screen, Memere whined, "Oh, those Jews are still complaining. They can't ever forget it." Riding the leading edge of hysteria,

Gabrielle recalled Leo's death-bed dictum against Allen, flicked a glance at him, and spit out, "Hitler should have finished off the job." Silent when Jack chorused in ugly agreement, Allen was even more shocked when the Kerouacs began to argue with each other. Memere's darling baby boy was now a "filthy prick." In some ghastly comradery, Jack growled back that his holy Mother Superior was a "Dirty old cunt."

A few days later Allen tried to combat Jack's anti-semitism with a rational list of his Jewish friends--Lucien in part, Seymour Wyse, Gilbert Millstein, Allen himself--to balance Brustein, Podhoretz, and the Hollywood producer Alfred Zugsmith, but Jack was too soggily emotional to be reasonable. Instead, he denounced Ferlinghetti for traveling to post-Castro Cuba. Jack was so wound up in insane political abstractions that he told Larry he hated him. Later he blamed his outburst on wine and Ferlinghetti's foolish political ideas, which Jack thought were the product of fear. In truth, the subject of political abstractions almost always made Jack stop thinking and confusedly mouth Leo's platitudes or Gabrielle's invective. This time he told Ferlinghetti that he should fear only death, then caught himself in mid-argument and admitted that death was a sweet and joyful reward. Politics was an octopus of argument that smothered him with two new arms when he'd ripped one away. Communists, he told Larry, were violent and nasty and--when Jack was quite drunk--

ruled by the "Jewish Ukraine," but members of the John Birch Society were thugs as well. The reflexive patriotism of a child of immigrants made him denounce pacifists as anti-American, but at heart Jack wanted only to preach Dickensian kindness to Americans holding hands not in some political union, but in the name of poetry.

Although it might well have spared him some grief had he done otherwise, Jack had no political quarrel with the media. That made him no less miserable because of it. Cholly Knickerbocker's "Smart Set" column ran an item that described one "Jack Kerouac"--an imposter--buying an expensive necktie on Fifth Avenue to wear as a belt, and ripples of incipient paranoia nibbled at Jack's mind. He felt like a lonely orphan hounded by "Jackals"--the police, the hoodlums, and the critics. New York Journal American columnist Louis Sobol was only joshing when he suggested that Jack succeed "the harassed Norman Mailer as the Existentialist Party's candidate for Mayor," but his wit wrenched from Jack a desperate plea for peace. "I am seriously devoted to my writing," he told Sobol, "someone who never was and never cared to be of the Beatnik clan."

The painful essence of his reply was that he hadn't written since 1957, had killed off his Escapade column, and would publish nothing of consequence in 1961. President Kennedy had enriched the spy writer Ian Fleming with a plug for his Casino Royale, but the First Lady could not reciprocate

for Jack when she told Reader's Digest that she read everything from "Colette to Kerouac." This tiny bit of publicity cheered Jack immensely, but his sales remained slow. A committee of Northport ladies raised a small ruckus and demanded the removal of his work from local bookracks while ignoring, Jack told Whalen, the sleazy, prurient violence of Mickey Spillane and his ilk.[2]

Far worse than all these distractions, Joan Haverty had come to New York to sue for child support, and served Jack with a warrant in March 1961. He hired Allen's brother Eugene Brooks as his counsel and began to rave about his bitch whore wife and her kike lawyer's attempt to steal Memere's money and life. Gabrielle had supported his art, and deserved to share his money; in any case, Jack knew that he was much too ill to ever hold a job again. He planned to leave the country if he lost the case, but Eugene held things off and Jack hollowly proclaimed to his friends that a paternity test would vindicate him. The ponderous, awesome law drained Jack, bled off his energy. The bad publicity, the divorce, lonely-bitchy Memere and his writing block each enclosed him in a mental prison cell that grew more confining every day. Even public events soured him. In April Yuri Gagarin became the first human to orbit the earth, and sarcastically announced that he saw no heaven, which infuriated Jack as much as the Cuban Bay of Pigs invasion five days later scared him. His life empty

but for foul dreams each night, Jack was, as a song later ran, "Buried alive in the blues." To Whalen he admitted that he was an incurable alcoholic, and except for his fifth, he didn't really give a damn about anything at all.

In May, Gabrielle finally convinced Jack to join Nin in Orlando. Their subdivision bungalow bored him, but a happy Memere made his life easier, and having Joan Haverty 1,500 miles away relaxed him enough to consider another summer trip to Bixby Canyon. Instead, in July he took a dismal, dusty room on Cerrida Medellion, Mexico City, looked once more into the mirror and saw the results of a river of whiskey and a thousand interruptions: "I got to look like a Bourgeois, pot belly and all, that expression in my face of mistrust and affluence (they go hand in hand?)."

He stiffened his resolve, lit a candle, and wrote Part II of "Desolation Angels," which carried his story from his fall 1956 visit to Mexico City through the ill-fated move to Berkeley. The writing was good but not nearly his best, and it was blighted by a running thread of sullen hostility, an ugliness foreign to his nature: "I shall bullwhip the first bastard who makes fun of human hopelessness any way." A mournful man more fit for Dostoyevskian Russia than this "modern America of crew cuts and sullen faces in Pontiacs," Jack saw himself as a "wondrous of contra-

dictions (good enough, said Whitman," and rambled to cover every facet. He painted Gabrielle as a "suspicious paranoid" who was also "patient, believing, careful, bleak, self protective, glad for little favors."[3] In a gloomy funk, he echoed Allen and sent a message to "Mao, Arthur Schlesinger Jr. at Harvard and Herbert Hoover": "Eternity, and the Here-and-Now, are the same thing," and "for every Clark Gable . . . comes disease, decay, sorrow, lamentation, old age, death, decomposition--meaning, for every little sweet lump of baby born that women croon over, is one vast rotten meat burning slow worms in graves death."

Just before he left Mexico, his suitcase was stolen, and he became so toweringly furious that he returned to Florida and drank a fifth of Johnny Walker Red a day for weeks at a stretch. Even his sense of his own writing was colored by his mood, and he told Carolyn that he'd use "Part II" later for notes. Though he'd change his mind in a month, for the moment all writing seemed meaningless, and he wanted to quit it as he'd quit football in 1940.

Fall in Florida lacked New England's cleansing breezes, but it was at least cooler. In September he slowed his drinking to sips of Martell Cognac, read Balzac and Dostoyevsky, and lost weight pitching horseshoes. A month later he swallowed some Benzedrine and jumped to his typewriter, where in ten days he wrote "Big Sur," his most remarkable book yet. "Big Sur" was an account of the previous summer in Bixby

Canyon, a totally detailed, oddly detached self-analysis of paranoia and madness. "Worth the telling," he said of his summer, "only if I dig deep into everything." "Big Sur's" seed was the question of a modern Job, "O why is God torturing me," and his Celinesque short-phrased word usage expressed perfectly his frenzied visions of Flying Horses and the Cross. Jack had always empathized with his subjects--even with a stranger on the street--but now he bridged his own agony and empathized with himself. The portrait was incisive, but cost him too much; he had literally given himself to his art, and the man that remained behind was shrunken and lost, without the desire to carry on.[4]

Volatile as always in the first glory of success, he anticipated writing books on Allen, Peter Orlovsky, Corso, Burroughs, and GJ in Lowell. When the flush of artistic glory faded, he reached for Johnny Walker and stayed drunk for weeks, got fat again and fell into deep depression. At the seat of his mood, he confessed to Carolyn, was his shame at exploiting his friends, though he made an effort to conceal names and circumstances. Philosophical, he swore that in the future the mess of their lives would be perceived as a simple working out of karma. Under the surface he anticipated the critics and rationalized that their certain rejection set him free to write as he wished. Partly as a result of that, "Big Sur" was a symbolic obituary for a "Beat Generation" whose publicity had eviscerated him.

As a public event, the "Beat Generation" was complete. The anthologies had come and gone, Evergreen had lost Donald Allen and tended to emphasize exotically suggestive pictures over experimental writing, and Big Table had ceased publication. Among the anthologies, Thomas Parkinson's A Casebook on the Beat and Donald Allen's The New American Poetry had been excellent, while the rest were either limp or crass. Parkinson had made an interesting mix of the very best poems of Corso and Ginsberg, Kerouac's "October in the Railroad Earth" and other essays, an excellent selection of Ferlinghetti, Snyder, Whalen, and McClure, and the critics--Podhoretz, Herbert Gold, and the first intelligent article on Jack, Warren Tallman's "Kerouac's Sound." The Casebook was truly superior to the exploitative quickies like Gene Feldman and Max Gartenberg's The Beat Generation and the Angry Young Men or even Seymour Krim's The Beats, both of which roped in Anatole Broyard and Chandler Brossard to fill out generally thin contents. Krim's own "The Insanity Bit" was superb, and his inclusion of Gary Snyder's "Notes on the Religious Tendencies" marked a fine taste, but basically, The Beats was weak.

The New American Poetry had no such problems. Though Donald Allen would later regret organizing it on a regional basis, the fact that it had been constructed out of a consensus of the poets themselves made it a powerful volume that encyclopedically included the best anti-New Critic work. The "Black Mountain" poets, the Beats, the San Franciscans and

dozens of others from across the country were all represented. United only by a revulsion for technical craft for its own sake, they agreed with Charles Olson when he said, "one loves only form, / and form only comes / into existence when / the thing is born." The collection did not express a new, structured establishment, as Robert Duncan later commented, but a poetic community whose work was destined to endure. Hypercritical, Allen felt that the Creeley and Corso selections were off and that Jack was underrepresented, but he conceded the book's high value. About the same time, Hall, Pack and Simpson organized a "rival" collection of traditional young men, The New Poets of England and America, without a single duplication of Donald Allen's book. Over the ensuing years, the "establishment" poets of Hall's book--Robert Bly, John Hollander, Robert Lowell--would alter their style to the looser, more personal mode of Donald Allen's rebels.

Although Evergreen continued to publish work by Ginsberg, Kerouac, Snyder and McClure through the early 1960s, the era's most interesting periodical was Michael McClure, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and David Meltzer's one-volume Journal for the Protection of All Beings. Mixing Thomas Merton, Artaud, Corso and Gary Snyder's "Buddhist Anarchism" with "The Surrender Speech of Chief Joseph [of the Nez Perce Indians]," the Journal further developed the earth consciousness implied by Jack's The Dharma Bums and

which would later coalesce in related form in Gary Snyder's Earth House Hold and Stewart Brand's The Whole Earth Catalogue.[5]

By 1961, the critics were through with the Beats. Allen and Gregory had left the country, while Jack had exiled himself to the land of swamp and geriatric wards, and the last few articles trickled out their insults without verve. Writing his way out of his own exile in a teaching post in Montana, New Yorker Leslie Fiedler informed Partisan Review readers that Allen Ginsberg had "invented" Jack through the 1957 media, transforming "the author of a dull and conventional Bildungsroman remembered by no one into a fantasy figure capable of moving the imagination of rebellious kids." Ginsberg himself, Fiedler declaimed, had been created by Lionel Trilling's short story "Of this Time, of that Place"--which turned out to have been written some three years before the Professor met his student. Ironically, in a time when Henry Miller's once unpublishable Tropic of Cancer ranked next to Harold Robbins on the best-seller lists, many critics were at last able to stop cringing and respect Ginsberg's poetry.

M. L. Rosenthal, once utterly revolted by Allen's explicitness, joined George Oppen in writing extremely respectful reviews of Kaddish. Fiedler had concluded, with a whistling-past-the-graveyard certainty, "Finally, the beats have made no difference." Jack told a high school student who interviewed him that the Beats were "the young people who have transformed literature from the colleges and acadamies

into the hands of the folk, in the same way that rock and roll young people have transferred music composition from Tin Pan Alley to the folk."[6] High culture and popular culture slipped past each other, and there the issue rested.

In his contemporary "Pome on Dr. Sax," Jack replicated his own life perfectly, turning the dream hero of his childhood into a skid row bum imprisoned in "this impossibly / hard life" with a bottle of rotgut Tokay for comfort. Kerouac felt sluggish, as if he were already entering senility. In November 1961 he left Florida for a month-long New York binge with painters Hugo Weber and Jacques Beckwith that crested when Jack was bounced from the Village Gate nightclub by the owner and welcomed back by the club's star performer, Stan Getz. Returning to Florida, Jack passed a lonely January and February while he typed up "Big Sur" in the company of Memere and three cats, and it was almost a relief for him to return to New York in March 1962 to settle in court with Joan Haverty. Family court was still a nightmare.

That year he wrote, "I demand that the human race / cease multiplying its kind / and bow out / I advise it." Although Jack "lost" on the blood test and was forced to acknowledge paternity, Joan's lawyer presented a thin case and the Honorable Judge Sidney Fine awarded Joan the sum of

twelve dollars a week child support until Janet Michelle Kerouac was twenty-one. Eugene Brooks, Jack's lawyer, felt that Jack's denials of paternity were sincere; since Jack had already lied to his counsel in an income history he'd prepared for the trial, his real convictions were open to question. Allen was convinced that the case might have been settled amicably but for Memere's fearful nagging, and he was probably correct.

New York State Case # 7275-1961 earned Jack one idiotic New York Daily News headline--"Beat Bard Denies He's the Daddy-O"--and united him briefly in Manhattan with Gregory Corso, who had returned to the United States. Gregory was disgusted with Jack, whom he thought "just cares about his self and demands I respect that self, but I can't if he just sits about babbling drunkenly how great he is and how bad who else is, so unreal, unrelated, that he truly bored me." A friend once wrote of Gregory that "I don't know anything that's going to keep Gregory from Angelism, of which heroin is perhaps a purer form than poetry."[7] Corso was severely addicted to junk at that time, and their different drugged realities were in separate universes.

Florida was as boring as ever on Jack's return, a tree-less subdivision slum noisily crammed with children, a lonely trap where Jack could only pass time, as he said, "WAITING FOR SOMETHING." The something never appeared. Turning away from a bleak present, he entered the past and

efficiently organized all of his letters and manuscripts in a shiny new filing cabinet. Only the mail mattered to him in the broiling heat, and it brought some good news. Sterling Lord had sold "Big Sur" and "Visions of Gerard" to Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, and the editor would be Jack's old friend Robert Giroux. Lord also sent a petition defending Barney Rosset in a Supreme Court censorship case over Henry Miller's Tropic of Cancer, and Jack signed it, secure in his companionship with Edmund Wilson and the 4th Amendment to the Constitution.

As the summer passed, Allen's letters from Africa and Asia joined Nabakov's Lolita as Jack's main entertainment. The flimsy green air mail squares contained huge messages of travels through India as well as weird news about Burroughs. Bill was "inhumanly independent of passions" and manipulative, a black magic "void preaching guru" who terrified an Allen still split by the metaphysical arc between Blake and Yage death. After a brief split-up, Allen and Peter had reunited in Israel, where Allen had consulted with the theologian Martin Buber, then journeyed to India via Kenya. In Bombay they had joined Gary Snyder and his wife Joanne Kyger, and the four of them had wandered across the sub-continent, true dharma bums.

The letters Jack sent to his friends were not so enlivening. In fact, they were mostly drunken babble, the same stories repeated three letters in a row, and reached a nadir

when he called Carolyn, the woman he revered, "Lady Cunt." As he confessed to Neal, he was wholly out of touch with reality and had been for a year. Drunk or sober, he was a dull blank who could barely pronounce his own name.[8]

Jack had talked for two months about going to Paris, Cornwall, and Scandinavia, but as his weight touched two hundred pounds and his alcohol consumption remained at the quart a day level, he had the DT's again, saw the devil and witches as in Bixby Canyon. Being near Nin did not compensate for her son's desperation, and Memere demanded that he find a house in New England.

Instead of Paris, Jack flew to Maine. But he decided that the French-Canadian resort town of Old Orchard Beach was "dreary" and sped off to a depressingly crowded Cape Cod. There the Negro bouncers at a jazz joint became insulted by his "nigger" talk and beat him unconscious. He returned to Orlando to heal, and Memere sent him to the one dependable friend he had remaining in America--John Clellon Holmes.

One Sunday in early September 1962, a sober Kerouac arrived in Old Saybrook to begin house hunting, and Jack, John and his wife Shirley spent a pleasant evening getting reacquainted, sharing literary chatter and story telling. On Monday a pajama-clad Jack resumed his chair to read Balzac and guzzle a quart of Hennesey Cognac a day. As in Jacky's apartment, he literally did nothing else; as

the work-week passed, this once meticulous man did not bathe or shave, and would come to the dinner table only when Shirley poured a glass of wine. Friday night he could not climb the stairs and passed out on the sofa. Saturday he revived, cleaned up, and managed to spend a few hours looking for a home, but one beer in the afternoon sent him off again. Afterwards he was guilt stricken at having screwed up once more. Unable to face Holmes, he packed an enormous Mason jar full of ice cubes and brandy and fled, stumbling into a hastily rented limousine for a sixty dollar ride to Lowell, a destination at once unlikely and utterly logical.

The King of the Beats had returned to his home town to receive homage, and never did Jack Kerouac put on a greater performance than in his twenty day pub crawl of Lowell, an alcoholic jubilee before an audience of Lowellites come to see a king who was his own court jester. His court was a very special group of people, a mix of young college-educated working class Greeks and Irish--Huck Finneral, Greg Zahos, Jay Pendergast, Danny Murphy--and the older Greek gamblers and bookies who habituated his stage, the Sac Club. Reaching back to his childhood, Jack called up his old comrade "GJ" Apostalakis, but GJ was a hustling insurance salesman who couldn't drink twenty-four hours a day, and after one uncomfortable night he avoided Jack. Mary Carney found Jack equally offensive, and their Sunday afternoon visit was awkward and brief.

With two exceptions--James Curtis, a lawyer with literary interests, and a Lowell Tech English instructor named Charles Jarvis--Lowell's middle class professional people wanted nothing to do with their town's most notorious citizen. Though Jack told Curtis that "someday they'll take down [the soldier's monument in front of City Hall] and put me up, just like Thomas Wolfe in Asheville," Lowell's elite ignored him then as forever.[9] Curtis and Jarvis had a half-hour on the local radio station called "Dialogues in Great Books," and they were thrilled at the opportunity to have a famous author on their program.

Well lubricated with beer and brandy, Jack gave them a performance they would never forget. Professor Jarvis opened the show with routine introductory remarks, and that was the final routine moment; when Jarvis spoke of "milestones" in Jack's career, Kerouac seized the microphone to proclaim, "I am Louis Milestone, gallstone . . . death." In the next half hour he raced through a rainbow of emotions that spanned the scale of human possibility, destroying his hosts' ideas of polite literary discussion with a display of consummate--if drunken--spontaneity. Irritated by the condescending way Curtis and Jarvis had treated their engineer, Jack introduced the man, then interrupted every question with a surreal monologue on Gerard, the nuns, and their childhood visits to the Franco-American Orphanage grotto. "And I have followed him ever since," Jack said, "because I know he's up there guiding

my every step." An erratic encyclopedia, Jack discoursed on Buddha, Yoga, the healthiness of headstands and Shakespeare, who had also written spontaneously and died of drink in Avon. The just-published Big Sur, Jack advised them, "went back to a vision I had of heaven--my job is to describe heaven, a little bit." Big Sur's style was like Proust, "only fast," and still resolutely spontaneous, because "Once God moves your hand--Go back and revise, it's a sin!"

Jack spent most of his time in Lowell at the center table of the Sac Club, a bar and bookie joint in the Acre. The table was usually surrounded by a shifting audience that included Manuel Nobriga, Voo the owner, Mousy, and Billy Koumantzelis, the younger brother of a close friend of Jack's who hadn't come back from World War II. A second ring pushed in around Jack's table and the crowd grew to a dozen or more with young college men like Huck Finneral and Greg Zahos. The last member of the circle was a very special man named Tony Sampas. Tony was Sammy's younger brother, a gaunt and balding man who betrayed his nerves with an unending stream of well chewed Marlboro cigarettes and a pained expression that masked his empathy for Jack and a thousand others. A remarkable blend of a friendly Lowell working guy, a former OSS guerilla, and a Master's Degree graduate in psychology, Tony was a man who liked to discuss literature as well as swap stories. Of himself Tony would only say that he "treated people good," but it was more than

that. Over the next few years he and his sister Stella would protect and cherish the bewildered Kerouac, becoming the family he had so long missed.

The Sac Club crowd dubbed Jack "Jacques le Coque" and he ruled the bar, calling for "More of the Grape"--Courvoisier--as he drew pictures on the table in cigarette ash, "table thumping," the Sun reported, "and jumping up to crow or bark or laugh." "Let's go," he shouted, "let's go to Paris and visit Cocteau . . . oh, but my favorite French writer is dead, he's dead." Memories boiling through his mind like opium smoke bubbles in a hookah, Jack raved on: "Once, I was in Morocco, and I saw a shepherd boy carrying a little LAMB . . . I hate what France has done to the French language. They've RUINED it. They've fancied it up . . . where they really speak French is in QUEBEC."

He'd come to Lowell to see the River and its haunted sand banks, the bridge and Pawtucketville, but he never got out of the bar, too intent on the stories around him. He even spilled drinks in his frantic excitement. His shyness and pain were obscured by the roar of the binge, the secure noise of working-class Lowell, a "vast collection of Christians," as he put it. From near the Sac Club's front door he could see the golden dome of the Greek Orthodox Church in the Acre and the steeple of his childhood St. Jean de Baptiste, and their vigil was a warm blessing of security that permitted him to indulge in noisy pleasure. Seriousness he fended off

except when one of his young proto-poet friends asked for advice about writing. Greg Zahos showed him some poems, and Jack tried to dissuade him from the road, from the quest: "The price is too high, kid. It'll kill you."[10] Perhaps he was reflecting on Time magazine, which reviewed Big Sur while he was in Lowell.

Some of the Big Sur reviews were astonishingly positive. In Saturday Review Herbert Gold thought Jack was "on the right road at last . . . in focus, troubling and touching." The New York Times Book Review felt Big Sur had "a sense of structure and pacing . . . the scenes click and signify." But Playboy sneered at his habit of dropping the g's from gerunds, and the Herald Tribune thought his writing was like a "Vogue perfume ad." Time issued an all-out attack, labelling the author of Dr. Sax and On the Road a "confirmed one-vein literary miner," and mocked his breakdown by sniffing, "a child's first touch of cold mortality--even when it occurs in a man of 41--may seem ridiculous and is certainly pathetic." Never cynically self-protective, Jack was perennially surprised by gross critical hostility, and unable to fully grasp the sources of such venom.

Ralph Gleason suggested that Kerouac had "committed the worst crime of those who go against the traditional in literature; he has been read." Jack's explanation to Neal and Carolyn was simpler, if ugly; the critics hated him because he wasn't Saul Bellow or Bernard Malamud or J. D. Salinger or

Herman Wouk, because he wasn't a Jew. In self-defense he adopted a facade of megalomanaical bravado, assuring the Cassadys--and anyone else who would listen--that he was the greatest American prose stylist since Melville, an equal of Joyce and Shakespeare.[11]

Such an extreme response bespoke a mind vulnerable to absurdity. In Jack's last week in Lowell he met a thirty-four year old barfly named Paul Bourgeois, who announced to the wobbly Kerouac that they were cousins. Further, Paul Bourgeois claimed that he was no Lowell bum but the "Moon Cloud Chief" of the Four Nations of the Iroquois, whose four families were named Kirouac, L'Evesque (Memere's maiden name), Sirois, and Bourgeois-Ogallag. Jack was entranced as Paul related the history of the Iroquois. Only three thousand remained in their home near the North Pole, Jack told Holmes and Ferlinghetti, because they were being "obliterated by atomic subs that bring dead fish and dead polar bears to the surface of their waters." "Chief [Bourgeois] wants to take them south," Jack reported, and "Rusk and State Department said Okay, wait a while." Because Jack was a cousin of the tribe, in two years he would be allowed to visit its homeland, chopping wood to earn his share of strengthening Caribou blood. It was a magnificent fantasy, worthy of Dr. Sax, and Jack accepted every word of Bourgeois's rantings, recruited Paul as driver-companion, and promised to write a book to free his brethren when he

sobered up. Perhaps Jack's letter to Ferlinghetti describing the Moon Cloud Folk revealed why the tale was so meaningful to him; he mentioned everyone's Indian name and concluded, "I intend to find out my own name there in two years." He really wasn't entirely sure any more.

The Sun columns had flooded the Sac Club with too large an audience, and Jack tired rapidly. Taking refuge in Tony Sampas' home to dry out, Jack collected Paul Bourgeois and another Lowell man as the first edition of the Lowell traveling squad that would surround him in his wanderings for the next few years. They set out for New York, where they drank with Lucien before Jack and Paul flew to Orlando. Memere swiftly determined that Bourgeois was a con artist and one morning while Jack was asleep she put Paul on a train for Lowell. Jack still couldn't stomach Florida, and after a few weeks of restful boredom he flew north to transfer his Florida mortgage to a home in Northport. Shortly before Christmas 1962, he and Memere moved into a well landscaped ranch house complete with a fireplace and the usual high fence for privacy. After a horrible year, Jack felt good enough to begin a new book, "Vanity of Duluoz," which would cover 1939 to 1945--football, the war, and Leo's death. "Duluoz" was the name of the persona Jack had chosen for the legend of his life; he hoped to publish a uniform edition of his chronicles some day that would replace his earlier pseudonyms. "Vanity of Duluoz" would take him four years to

complete.

A major source of Jack's writing difficulties was the minimal demand for his work. In part because of Jack himself, American youth culture had shifted. The romantic energy of On the Road had filled a need in the dull stasis of 1957, but the atmosphere of 1962 was permeated by the Cuban missile crisis. Like a political heir to Houdini, John Kennedy had thrilled the nation even as he won its admiration for his cool, super-masculine courage in facing down the Soviet Union over the missile sites. Kennedy's stylish first lady, his games of touch football and his formation of the Peace Corps united with his undoubted courage to create the image of Camelot; most of the era's wave of youthful romantic energy became embodied in the style of the "Best and the Brightest."

Most of the drop-outs who'd left the conventional world for North Beach and the Village ran home to careers, but in every American city and college town a few hardy subterraneans struggled on. The destruction of the "Beat Generation" had made them wary, and the mid-sixties underground culture reflected the times with a starkly aggressive style. In the wake of the Beats, three special voices added themselves to the chorus of visionary discontent, a trio of scalpel-eyed artists who encountered America and found it

wanting: William Burroughs, Lenny Bruce, and Bob Dylan.[12]

Despite the publication of Junkie and his work in the Chicago Review, William Burroughs achieved major attention in America only late in 1962. In 1958, Ferlinghetti had warned that the publication of "Naked Lunch" was "pure and unpremeditated legal lunacy," but in November 1962 Grove Press brought out what Norman Mailer would describe as "prose written in bone, etched by acid." Naked Lunch was a "frozen moment," Burroughs said, "when everyone sees what it is on the end of every fork." His knife-edge satire brought Jonathan Swift to Jack's mind with the hope that it might shock its readers into honesty. Bill thought it was a "modern inferno" whose chief character "Dr. Benway" resembled the Grand Inquisitor in The Brothers Karamazov.

Grove Press had published the most horrible book in American history, a series of withered, deadpan images of obscenity. The images coalesced to portray addiction not as a vice but as the given state of Americans enslaved by their need to be controlled, to repress their sexuality in material consumption. Addiction was something Burroughs knew well; morphine was, he realized, "the ideal product . . . the ultimate merchandise . . . the junk merchant does not sell his product to the consumer, he sells the consumer to his product." Junk created a biological totalitarianism, a manipulative addict-dealer structure that was a harsh and simplified replica of modern society's web of electronic and

political controls. Junk was a virus of addiction, but the deceitful words of government agencies, advertisements and the mass media were a virus as well. Naked Lunch and Burroughs' succeeding volumes were designed to satirically innoculate the reader against the virus with a silence of perfect awareness that cancelled out the insidious desire to be controlled, the mainstay of the liberal technocratic ideology Burroughs despised. "Control," he wrote, "can never be a means to any practical end . . . It can never be a means to anything but more control . . . like junk."[13]

"I can feel the heat closing in," he began, and then dragged himself and his readers through a carnie horror show called Interzone, where "Factualists" like Lee (Burroughs) fought totalitarian "Liquefactionists" and liberal-manipulative "Senders." Interzone was a no-place occupied by the likes of "A.J." the merchant of sex, who enjoyed whipping his purple assed baboon through a crowded El Morocco-like nightclub. It was a land of "random insect doom" whose chief citizen was Dr. Benway, "a manipulator and coordinator of symbol systems, an expert in all phases of interrogation, brainwashing, and control." The book brutally satirized religious control: Mohammed "was dreamed up by the Mecca Chamber of Commerce. An Egyptian ad man on the skids from the sauce wrote the continuity." Disturbing as well, Lunch depicted junkies in wait for the needle, gibbering and drooling, "you expect any moment a great blob of protoplasm

will flop right out and surround the junk. Really disgust you to see it." Burroughs ran a verbal riff on the Star Spangled Banner unique in its ferocity, but the weight of his attack was directed more deeply than abstract patriotism, to sex. Sexual repression he pulverized with recurrent images of hangings, "John" and "Mary" debauching themselves with their friend "Mark's" hanged, ejaculating body.[14]

Norman Mailer gave the book instant cachet when he told the Edinburgh Writer's Conference that Burroughs was "the only American novelist living today who may conceivably be possessed by genius," and Mary McCarthy's review in the powerful new New York Review of Books was sensible, intelligent, and positive. They were nearly unique. The New Republic thought it was "trash," Time dismissed it as "second growth Dada," and the Partisan Review only shuddered.

The book made curious sense in 1962, just as Jack's tender faith did not. It was a time when the U.S. tested nuclear weapons in the atmosphere, extended electronic communications with the Telstar satellite, and made best-sellers of two realistic books about a potential nuclear war, Fail Safe and Seven Days in May. Aside from President Kennedy, the hero of the age was James Bond, the cool English agent "007" who armed himself with flashy technical gadgets bearing the right brand names and went off to slay all threats to the Western hegemony. America's fantasy hero was racist, sadomasochistic, anti-emotional, anti-woman and

terribly efficient.[15]

Bond's diametric opposite was the second artistic successor to the Beats, a bitterly romantic hip "white Negro" named Lenny Bruce, who raised "stand up comedy" to unprecedented levels of artistry along the lines of the Beats, and shared in their critical fate. Bruce lampooned everything from prison movies ("Father Flotsky") to race ("Colored Friends") to class ("White Collar Drunk"), but the razor style of his monologues made Jack detest him. Once Jack and some young buddies visited John Holmes, a bona fide Lenny Bruce fanatic. The young men begged John to play one of Bruce's records, and Jack shrieked that Lenny was a "kike, dirty mouth, mean," and drowned out the rest of the record. Jack's muse was sadness, and he distrusted Lenny's touchstone of rage, the muse of Ira. It had been years since Jack defended the Church, but Lenny's blasphemous "Religions Incorporated" shocked him; no son of Memere could laugh at "John Baby," the Pope.

Such narrowness was a grievous loss for Jack, because Lenny was his spiritual kin. Equally cursed by lonely childhoods, smothering mothers, and a distaste for regimentation, they shared as well a common obsession with jazz and the carnival of Times Square. A critical difference between them was that Lenny's drugs of choice were usually stimulants like Methedrine or mescaline, while Jack remained loyal to alcohol.

In January of 1958 Bruce opened in a San Francisco club called Ann's 440; the Beat liberation of culture allowed him to say things he'd never dared before, and in a few weeks his career exploded with the publicity of Herb Caen, Ralph Gleason, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti. Lenny's comedy rapidly surpassed the funny but packaged bits like "Father Flotsky" with Visions of Cody-style spontaneity and free association, a narrative based on orally dictated rhythm rather than any pre-set form. Lenny was as naked on stage as Allen had been at the Six Gallery, like Burroughs a shaman exorcising his and his generation's guilts, a Kerouacian truth-teller who improvised a tale from what a later writer called the viewpoint of an "alienated conservative."

Outraged by Lenny's freedom, the Catholic Church and the police set out to destroy him with a series of obscenity and narcotics arrests. In four years Lenny was broke, fat, and dissipated, though still madly confident that the courts would vindicate him. Tattered and torn, he yet had a message for his country. Its allusion to Christ would have shocked Jack, who had long since closed his mind to Bruce. Although Jack chose not to understand him, Lenny was like Jack when he told the nation: "Remember this, I'm dying for your sins. I'm dying, so--well, just shape up! That's all, I'm dying so that, in the future, things will be right, so you just realize what the values are. Good things--re-

member the good, remember that being born is an original sin."[16]

The third Beat heir was a poet and singer from Hibbings, Minnesota. Kitten fragile, spring steel tough, almost decadently sensitive, Bob Dylan scoured a path of Rimbauvian fire and visionary prophecy across an America whose most popular music in the early 1960s was Bobby Vinton's "Roses are Red," the "Wah-wah Tusi," and "The Stripper." Though Dylan came to fame as a protege of Woody Guthrie, "he was always," in the words of his biographer, "too much a freak for the folk crowd." His first recorded songs ranged from a folk saga of a larger-than-life character named "Rambling Gambling Willie" to a vignette of a wino called "Man on the Street" to a road blues called "Standing on the Highway"--"Tryin' to bum a ride . . . Nobody seem to know me, / Everybody pass me by."

In a blend of cultural traditions, the songs came out of his populist Guthrie heritage full of images that might have come from Visions of Cody. Dylan's alienation from his native land was far too deep to be satisfied by wearing blue jeans and celebrating "the folk." It was only when he read Time's "Fried Shoes" article on Allen and Gregory's Chicago reading and saw through the distortion that he realized that there were "other people out there like me!" A friend gave him a copy of Mexico City Blues and later Dr. Sax and Big Sur, and Dylan grew ecstatic with the knowledge that words could be free. By 1962 his rhythmically visionary

indictment "A Hard Rain's A Gonna Fall" was a clear successor to "Howl": "I saw a highway of diamonds with nobody on it, / I saw a black branch with blood that kept drippin', I saw a white ladder all covered with water, / I saw ten thousand talkers whose tongues were all broken." "Brecht of the Juke Box," the Voice called him, "The first poet of the mass media," said Ralph Gleason. "With God On Our Side" was a bitterly sarcastic review of patriotism that was estranged from Kerouac's faith, but as Dylan developed over the next few years his songs assumed an autobiographical, visceral orientation much like The Subterraneans. In a creative breakthrough of style that earned him accusations of treason from the folk critics, Dylan affirmed a boyhood spent listening to Little Richard, picked up an electric guitar, and brought his life and art back home to the Afro-American beat of rock and roll.

Dylan lived on a frightening mental frontier, and his songs often expressed Rimbaud's "systematic derangement of the senses," the tortuous separation from structured America that Lucien and Jack had confronted thirty years before. Dylan's political epigrams--"Don't follow leaders / watch the parkin' meters" and "You don't need a weather man / To know which way the wind blows"--were as anarchistically beat as The Dharma Bums. Death preoccupied the singer as it had his predecessors, sublimely expressed in his song "It's All right Ma (I'm only bleeding)":

While them that defend what they cannot see
With a killer's pride, security
It blows their minds most bitterly
For them that think death's honesty
Won't fall upon them naturally
Life sometimes
Must get lonely.

Again Holmes tried to interest Jack in this new artist; Jack thought Dylan was "another fucking folk singer" at first, but after a while gruffly conceded that "Well, okay, he's good."[17] A tired forty-year-old man, Jack had no desire left to digest anything new, especially when it issued from a youth culture that snickered at his pot belly.

Jack and Memere's new home at 7 Judy Ann Court, Northport, was the most elaborate that they had ever lived in, and Jack was proud of the two baths, the fireplace, and the finished basement with its wood panelled rumpus room. As he settled into it and the New Year 1963, it occurred to him that this was Memere's twenty-sixth home since his birth, and though it was nice to have a fancy home, it had somehow come too late. He'd wanted to be a bhikku, he told Whalen, but he also wanted a nice home for Memere. Now he had the house, but his feelings of solitary religiosity had been leached away in booze, and he was empty. A melancholy lassitude settled over him, and he paced gray January Northport out of touch, not even sure where Allen and Gary were any more,

certain only that his road life was from another world, another lifetime.

Having combed old newspaper clippings, family pictures and letters in preparation, he tried to begin "Vanity of Duluoz," but a February letter from Carolyn scattered his thoughts like a collapsed house of cards. After Neal's probation ended in July, Carolyn informed him, they were getting a divorce. Jack worshiped the marriage pact--especially Neal and Carolyn's--because he could not have it himself. As irregular as the Cassady marriage usually was, it had been a dependable factor in Jack's life for fifteen years, and now it was gone. The Cassady children were his especial concern, and he advised Carolyn not to bother her son with the nosy and foolish P.T.A., and to bless her daughters with the Sermon on the Mount rather than party dresses. Carolyn had wanted to free Neal to go his own way, but later she thought she'd destroyed him.

Neal took up with a woman named Anne Murphy Maxwell, alternately his slave and tormentor for the next five years. Bereft of his security in Carolyn, he swept into a purgatory of suffering that would endure to his death. Late in July, Cassady came east to Northport with Anne and a friend.

When they were alone, Jack found Neal graciously peaceful and illuminating, but Anne raided the refrigerator and Neal's other companion put his feet on the kitchen table. In Memere's house Jack observed the formalities, and he became

grievously offended. The possibility that Neal's car was stolen unnerved him and he quickly sent his visitors away, so shaken by the pathetic guttering out of his past that he stopped drinking for several weeks.

That summer, Holmes sent Jack a list of questions as part of the research that led to his book "Nothing More to Declare," and Kerouac's answers were a sad reflection of his distaste for life and the mind-controlled, antiseptic world he inhabited. Life was so horrible, Jack felt, that children cried at birth because they did not want to be exiled from the bliss of the womb. "All life is suffering."

The summer of 1963 passed in quiet gloom, and in September Farrar, Straus and Company published Visions of Gerard. Jack's shy, sentimental memoir was wholly out of place in a society of ninety thousand millionaires, a consumer's paradise of Barbie Dolls and Polaroid Color Pack Cameras, a circus of football led by Jim Brown. The slow, easy rhythm of Jack's childhood baseball had been replaced as the national game by professional football, a gigantic, swift and brutal new sport that was emblematic of the times. Zip codes and direct dialing had further standardized living patterns, and that fall when President John Kennedy died in Dallas, seven of every ten Americans knew of it in one half hour, and 99.8% of them knew by dark. Such efficiency was the backdrop against which the critics adjudged Visions of Gerard as "self-indulgence" and "garrulous hipster yawping."

The reviews, Jack thought, were like dirty gray cobwebs pulled over his eyes, and the worst was Newsweek, which called him a "tineared Canuck" and denied the essence of his work because "childhood is intrinsically a bore, and heartsy-flowery recreations of it are intrinsically a fraud." Preaching compassion had only earned Jack insults, and he wondered, in his direct, personal way, how the critics could label Norman Mailer a "radical moralist" after what he'd done to Adele Morales.[18]

The past seemed to curve into the present, and bits of Jack's life began to wither and die. Allen returned to the United States in December, but Kerouac was uncomfortable with what he saw as Allen's white robed messiah complex. After the Blake vision and "Howl," after "Kaddish" and the Yage death, Allen had relaxed within himself in an epochal metaphysical epiphany he called, simply, "The Change." "THE SNAKE'S ALL TOOK CARE OF," he told Jack, "I renounce my Power: so that I do live and I will Die . . . I am that I am and no more mental universe arguments . . . and what exactly am I? Why I'm me, and me is my feelings . . . located to be exact in my belly trembling when eyes say yes." Martin Buber had told him it was a "personal, human Universe," and Swami Shivananda had said "Your own heart is your guru." Now he knew.

In India, Ginsberg saw the dying riddled with fly-infested sores as they lay in the gutters of Calcutta, smoked

ganja and smelled the brainsmoke of the burning bodies on the ghats, prayed to "Kali, Durga, Ram, Hari, Krishna, Brahma, Buddha, Allah, Jaweh, Christ, Mazda, Coyote," sent Jack a leaf from the sacred Bo tree of Gautama Buddha and bathed in the holy Ganges. Stopping to see Gary and Joanne in Japan, he ended up in bed between them and felt secure lying between friends. A few days later, on a train ride to Tokyo, Allen was flooded by an inexplicable but wholly felt mystic resolution of his cosmic search. He burst into tears and came back to the present and his self, released himself from his death vows of cosmic consciousness, gave up so that he could go on, became one with his body, came back.[19]

Jack could not follow his younger brother in a pattern of spiritual growth, for it was far too late for that; he was tired, used-up, without the faith in life and search that made a cosmic odyssey possible.

As he told Carolyn, his present task was to sweat life out, to pass through the world patiently waiting for death to enfold him.

CHAPTER XVII

THE VILLAGE IDIOT

> Idiot wind, blowing every time you move
> your mouth, blowin' down the back
> roads headin' south . . . Idiot wind,
> blowing through the corners of the tomb.
> Bob Dylan

Life passed as seen through the blur of a highball, and Jack took further refuge in the identity of a noisily wise fool; he could no longer effectively write, but he still had something to teach. As he'd put it in his journal, he'd become a "village idiot" to uplift and free his audience, and by 1964 his persona as boastfully silly barroom oracle was firmly established and often misunderstood. Though the butt of Jack's wretchedly scurrilous anti-semitic attacks, Allen for one refused to take Jack seriously. "Once you gave it back to him, he'd laugh and back off," Allen recalled later. "He was teasing the identity as a Jew, for in the Buddhist sense there is no self . . . it was more a mocking of hypocrisy and timidity and liberal mealymouthedness, a red-neck jocularity that was aggressive but more xenophobic than anti-semitic."

Kerouac could deal only with individuals, and though he delighted in abusing pretentious intellectuals face-to-face with a baseball capped working class harangue, he was usually within bounds. When he blithered of abstractions removed from his immediate reality, John Holmes pointed out, "he was full of shit." Much of the empty noise was the

product of a man unsure of his identity, a man who could argue seriously for hours that he was the grandson of Pope Piux the sixth, who grasped eagerly for roots as a member of the "Moon Cloud Folk" or as a Cornishman. He had long cherished his Breton ancestry, but now his lectures on the ancient Celtic origins of the name Kerouac took on an obsessive quality, as if he were trying to reassure himself that he still existed. It was not only his spiritual and mental reality that had deteriorated, but his sexual self-image as well. Though Memere refused to take phone messages or allow Allen in the house--Jack by now conceded to Allen that she was as ill as Naomi had been--Jack would journey to the city to appeal to Ginsberg. "I'm old, ugly, red-faced," Jack blubbered, "I'm beer-bellied and a drunk and nobody loves me anymore. I can't get girls, come on and give me a blow job." After all his years of desire for the "romantic, handsome . . . dark, doomed" Kerouac, Allen couldn't respond, sexually revolted by the man before him who didn't look like Jack anymore, as Allen realized with a start, but Leo.[1]

Jack's sullen age made their relationship sputter fitfully, for he lived in the past now, having opted out of non-alcoholic sociability.

Allen, although he was not writing, was in an excitingly creative present. Set free by his metaphysical experience "The Change," Allen had moved into what might over-simply be called politics, his activities devoted to

what a critic called "the expansion and generation of mutual consciousness," a planetary sense of the one-ness of life. For the first time in many years, Allen's blend of cultural and political radicalism had acquired a responsive audience. Earlier, most bohemian dropouts had been apolitical, and most of the post-war era's few leftists had been aggressively middle class in manner. In a strange marriage, the Beats and Kennedy liberalism had together given birth to the "Movement," a loose collection of anti-war, anti-poverty, and civil rights groups composed largely of white college youth. As Village Voice reporter Jack Newfield later argued, the Movement was "an ethical revolt against the visible devils of centralized decision making, manipulative, impersonal bureaucracies, and the hypocrisy that divides America's ideals from its actions." This revolt derived quite as much from Howl and On the Road as Michael Harrington's poverty study The Other America, and dreamt of a utopia more akin to William Blake than Mao Tse-Tung.

It was certainly no coincidence that the Movement began at the time of liberalism's greatest triumph. Lyndon Johnson had harnessed the grief of a country desolated by the loss of a Prince with his own political cunning to engineer the legislative culmination of the New Deal. The Job Corps, VISTA, and the Economic Opportunity Act attacked poverty, and in the next two years Congress dramatically increased federal aid to education. Medicare for the aged,

rent supplements, Model Cities programs, a Voting Rights Bill and a Housing Rights and Civil Liberties Bill all erupted out of Congress to form the Great Society. Sure that the liberal technocratic mentality that fostered these solutions was the core of the problem, a few radical activist youth wanted no part of it.

In 1964 alone, several events whispered the future to those who could hear. On August 4 the U.S. strafed vessels of the North Vietnamese Navy in retaliation for an incident in the Gulf of Tonkin, and immediately after Congress voted the President unlimited powers to prosecute a war that would effectively eliminate the financing of wars on poverty and eventually destroy a generation's faith in liberalism. Young radicals lost their hopes early on when the Democratic Party excluded the integrated Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party delegation from the 1964 Atlantic City convention, only weeks after the mutilated bodies of three civil rights workers were found under a dam in Neshoba County, Mississippi. In September student activists fresh from southern voter registration drives led the Free Speech Movement strike against the University of California at Berkeley in an explicit protest against President Clark Kerr's liberal technocratic style of education. The September release of the Warren Report was a final portentious event. Over the ensuing years the holes in the Report would stimulate a cynical doubt of

the government and a refusal to accept any account of John Kennedy's assassination--and increasingly government in general--that did not include notions of conspiracy.

Against a backdrop of optimistic liberalism, Allen practiced an anarchistic resistance to a police state. He protested the arrest of Lenny Bruce and the shutdown of an underground movie theater showing the film "Flaming Creatures," and devoted much of his energy to a scholarly research program into the history of drug laws in the U.S., "Documents on Police Bureaucracies' Conspiracy Against Human Rights of Opiate Addicts and Constitutional Rights of Medical Profession Causing Mass Breakdown of Urban Law and Order." Ginsberg's drug file soon dictated a complex set of conclusions that centered on the argument that the federal narcotics bureaucracy headed by Harry Anslinger had illegally wrested control of drugs from the medical to the police professions in the 1920s and 30s, and still exploited drug traffic. Allen had begun his research with an emotional concern for friends like the still addicted Herbert Huncke, but out of his sentiment came an intellectual probe into the nature of a bureaucratic state's interference in the lives of social-chemical nonconformists; drugs had traditionally been an aid to illumination for wisdom seekers, and as such were anathema to all authority structures.

The government tried to control drug research, but the accident of Dr. Albert Hoffman of Sandoz Pharmaceuticals--

his finger touched a microscope slide, then his mouth--wrought high irony. As Allen later commented, "technology has produced a chemical which catalyzes a consciousness that finds the entire civilization leading up to that chemical pill absurd, because the consciousness was there all along with the animals in the forest."[2]

Allen, Jack, Neal, McClure, Burroughs, Snyder, Whalen--all of them had taken organic peyotl over the years, had overcome the bitter nausea and learned their various spiritual lessons. When Dr. Hoffman touched his finger to his mouth he ingested a compact, easily mass-produced hallucinogenic with few physical side effects called Lysergic Acid Diethylmide, LSD-25; a whirling cosmic eternity now fit into a sugar cube. In the summer of 1964 the most creative students of LSD in the world, the "Merry Pranksters," were on their way to New York in a magical school bus driven by--who else?--the psychedelic chauffeur, Neal Cassady.

After his release from prison Neal had fallen in with a writer named Ken Kesey, a former University of Oregon wrestler then on a fellowship at Stanford University. Kesey had discovered LSD while employed as a drug-test subject, and when his book <u>One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest</u> put him financially ahead, he elected to spend his profit in financing a quest. His various friends, Cassady among them, gathered at a house in rural La Honda south of San Francisco and began to explore the new dimensions of reality

visible when LSD wiped clean what William Blake had called "the doors of perception." Great visionary poets like Yeats, Blake, and Wordsworth had been able to see all reality trembling in a drop of dew, and with LSD that ecstasy was within everyone's reach.

At La Honda, Kesey recalled, "suddenly people were stripped before one another and behold; as we looked, and were looked on, we all made a great discovery; we were beautiful. Naked and helpless and sensitive as a snake after skinning, but far more human than that shining nightmare that had stood creaking in previous parade rest." Kesey continued, "we were alive and life was us. We joined hands and danced barefoot amongst the rubble. We had been cleansed, liberated! We would never don the old armors again. But we reckoned without the guilt of this country."

They called themselves the Merry Pranksters, psychedelic warriors in dayglo paint, and they set out to free America. Their "biography," Tom Wolfe's The Electric KoolAid Acid Test, focused on Kesey as a leader, but the essence of the LSD experience was that there were no leaders, only angels. They acquired an old school bus, suitably redecorated it with a music system, silks and paint, and set out to visit the East Coast and consult with drug expert Timothy Leary. Neal drove the bus because--because Neal was the driver, the man nicknamed "Speed Limit," the voyager of inner space nearest to transcending the gap be-

tween thought and action. It seemed to Wolfe that Neal resented his role as "holy primitive, the holy beast, the Denver kid," that "people tuned him out when he tried to get thoughtful." Yet Neal was a teacher of perception, an expert on "subjects that haven't been identified yet," sensed Jerry Garcia, a gifted young guitarist whose band "The Grateful Dead" played for the Prankster parties, the "Acid Tests." Kesey said of Neal's path that it was "the yoga of a man driven to the cliff edge by the grassfire of an entire nation's burning material madness. Rather than be consumed by this he jumped, choosing to sort things out in the fast flying but smog free moments of a life with no retreat." Wrapped in the satori now of no retreat, Neal lived with an extraordinary sensitivity to his environment, an ongoing spontaneous monologue of observation punctuated by the phrase "you understand."

The Pranksters arrived in Manhattan and Cassady raced off to Northport to corral his brother and bring him to the party. Jack had thought highly of <u>One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest</u>, and in turn Ken acknowledged a heavy literary debt to Kerouac; Neal ached to bring his old and new cohorts together in an epochal summit conference of literary hip. As they roared out of Northport Jack blanched when Cassady gulped down amphetamines, and the ride became a wrenching ordeal for a sick, tired refugee trapped with a babbling Cassady whom drugs had rocketed past the speed of sound.

The party made Jack equally uncomfortable. Everyone but he had taken LSD, and the environment--floodlights, endless robot re-echoing tapes, complex mirrors that distorted reality, an American flag as a couch cover--made no sense to him. Cavorting about for their movie camera, the young pranksters were anarchically uninterested in a serious intellectual conversation. Any friend of Neal's, they thought, could adapt to LSD culture as easily as Allen had; Jack demurely walked over to the sofa, carefully folded the flag, and asked them if they were communists. Conversation was impossible, and Jack left abruptly. Regretful, Kesey said that "we should have gone out to Northport quietly in the night," but it was too late.[3]

Neal and Allen's participation in the early spread of LSD was not the only effect of the Beat circle on the growing youth culture of the 1960s. In fact, the Beat saga would influence millions of youth who might never read a word. Rock and roll produced at least two songs about Neal over the coming years, and both were superb. A duo called "Aztec Two Step" permanently enshrined his archetype with the lovely "Persecution and Restoration of Dean Moriarity":

> He was born on the road in the month of July
> and he'll live on the road till he sees fit to die
> 'cause he learned from the road how humanity cries
> how society lies, he sees with more than his eyes.

"Cassidy" was the second song, an exquisitely beautiful ballad written by Bob Weir, a friend of Neal's and rhythm guitarist for the Grateful Dead.

Though Neal was the perfect hero, the other members of the Beat circle influenced the youth culture as well. William Burroughs' work contributed names to the rock groups "Steely Dan" and "The Soft Machine," as well as phrases in several songs by the "Rolling Stones." Another rocker, Boz Scaggs, had roamed Europe, as he put it, as a "dharma bum," and On the Road decisively influenced two of the demigods of rock. David Bowie got his copy at age twelve, and was never the same again. Janis Joplin found hers in Texas and left for the West Coast, there to become queen of rock and roll. Yet perhaps the classic transmission of heritage came when a rag tag group in Liverpool took the phrase "Beat," played the toughest Afro-American music it knew how, and became the "Beatles."[4]

Harassed beyond their endurance when local teenagers peeked into their windows, the Kerouacs moved in August 1964, this time to St. Petersburg, Florida. Secure in the world's largest open-air mausoleum, Jack shot pool, ate Kentucky Fried Chicken, and visited with local sportswriters, but his few weeks of peace and quiet were made irrelevant by a shattering September: His sister Nin collapsed and died of a heart attack

when her husband asked for a divorce, and now the five Kerouacs were but two. Memere was emotionally destroyed by the loss of her daughter, and Jack was left to sit alone night after night in his easy chair as memory storms flashed and crackled through his brain. Even as a child he had approached death with an appalled seriousness, but funeral parlor visits at the age of forty-two, the wakes when he was slow and tired and fat and not at all sure that he could still write--those rituals ate him alive.

The winter after Nin's death was grim and sour. Jack corrected the galleys of "Desolation Angels," tried and failed to begin "Vanity of Duluoz," was uplifted by reading a biography of James Joyce and made gloomy again when he spent a night in jail after drunkenly relieving himself in public. He worried about money and his lack of financial stature when he received royalty checks for $1.37 and $15.19, but Playboy ran "Good Blond" in January 1965 and Horizon bought a piece on his bus ride to Berkeley with Memere. As he read Desolation Angels, published in June of 1965, he was certain that his life-long rendering of consciousness, "The Duluoz Legend," was still the right literary choice. Still, it was a tender oddity in a period when best-sellers almost unanimously concerned John Kennedy or war, either cold or hot--The Spy Who Came in From the Cold, You Only Live Twice, The Looking Glass War, The Green Berets, The Man with the Golden Gun.

As a result of this aggressive atmosphere, the critics of Desolation Angels were condescending. Kerouac was a "Bumbling Bunyan," Time said, who stood on his head not to relieve his phlebitis but "because that is his notion of how Buddhists behave." To other critics, Desolation Angels had "a great deal to say about the time when he and his cohorts should have been coming of age"; it was "obsolete," a "disaster," an "inconsequential epic" of "exhibitionistic cults of coterie iconoclasts." One review was different. Dan Wakefield had disparaged Jack's Village Vanguard appearance, but he had changed in the intervening six years. According to Wakefield, "Probably no other American writer--no, not even Norman Mailer--has been subjected to such a barrage of ridicule, venom, and cute social acumen as Kerouac." "If the Pulitizer Prize in fiction were given for the book that is most representative of American life," Wakefield reported, "I would nominate Desolation Angels," though the judges would doubtless be afraid. "We seldom recognize a real American dream when we see one," he added.[5]

Dreams were all Jack had, and they were mostly nightmares. Fleeing the critics and the summer heat, he traveled to France in an attempt to break the writer's cramp that had plagued him for the four years since he had written Big Sur. Once more in search of his roots and sense of self, Jack flew to Paris in July 1965, planning to research the Kerouac geneology with a visit to Brittany and perhaps add

the sounds of the English Channel to his poem "Sea," which he had begun at Bixby Canyon.

Later Jack said he'd had some sort of satori on his trip to France, but he could never be certain where or when or even whether it had any effect. What was sure was that an icicle of loneliness stabbed him on his gray morning arrival at Orly Airport. Nervously locking his suitcase--there were no more rucksacks in his life--Jack pinned the key to his t-shirt as Memere had instructed and went off to La Madelaine, the enormous revolutionary era Greek temple of reason that was now a Catholic church. Soon he found a comfortable neighborhood in the Montparnasse district, the home of the "Lost Generation" of an earlier day. Though he had praised Gertrude Stein, Jack did not visit her nearby home at Rue des Fleurus nor the lovely Luxembourg Gardens down the block, but located a bar. As it grew late he bought a woman as well, a soft denizen of the Paris night who reassured him that he was not impotent while hustling him for $120.

Headquartered in a new cafe in the St. Germain district, he drank Cognac and revelled in being able to speak French to his barmates, tickled by memories of a Horace Mann teacher who'd mocked his accent as he lectured the entire cafe on the superiority of the Breton-Quebec pronunciation of the language. In a crippling swirl of lonely pathos, Jack wandered the redlight district of Pigalle, and became

threatened by men who seemed to be following him; in self-defense he pulled out his Swiss Army knife and cut himself as he opened it.

After a few days in St. Germaine bars, Jack struck out for the Bibliotheque National and discovered that the records he needed had been burned by the Nazis, argued with a clerk at another library, and retreated to a bar where he tried to find a pool game as in old St. Pete, and failed. Paris rejected him, or so it seemed, and he became perturbed by the truly murderous auto traffic, convinced that a gendarme had deliberately misled him, that every dark doorway harbored muggers. Even his French publisher Gallimard rebuffed him when he called his editor and was disconnected. Though he'd sneered at the American tourists who infested Paris even as they seemed to hate it, Jack was so lonely that he struck up an acquaintance with some fellow citizens and shared with them his only meal in France before going to see the film Beckett.

Ever after, Paris would remind him of one awful embarrassment. He'd come in out of a misty Saxian night to the original namesake of his baptism church, the chapel of St. Louis de France, and sat in peaceful reverie contemplating the warm, candle-lit statues and stained glass. As he listened spellbound to an organ and horn cantata, Jack looked like a homeless vagrant with his stubbly face and faraway look, and a pious woman who reminded him of Memere

passed by and dropped twenty centimes, four cents, into the hat he held upside down in his lap. Stricken with shame, he was so confused that he forgot to put the gift in the poor box, stumbled out and plunged into the comfort of brandy.

A few days later he missed his flight to Brest, the capital of Brittany, because of an ill-timed visit to the men's room. He caught a train and grew drunk enough to lecture a priest on religion. On his arrival in a foggy Brest, he wandered forlorn, a distraught fugitive reeking of liquor, too nervous to speak to anyone until the police directed him to a boarding house. The next morning he cleaned up and put on a tie, then decided to return immediately to Paris. When Jack explained that he was Jean Louis Lebris de Kerouac, a friendly bookie-bartender persuaded him to call at least one person named Lebris before he left. Though Jack enjoyed his visit with Ulysse--Ulysses, the first voyager of the road!--Lebris, and signed autographs for Monsieur Lebris' charming daughter, he went to catch the train anyway, missed it by three minutes, drank for eight hours, and caught the night train. In Paris he hired a taxi which whirled him fleetingly around the City of Light, past Ste. Chappelle, the perfect jewel of a chapel he'd planned only a week before to visit.

One place he'd never even planned to visit was the young vagabond headquarters of Paris, Chez Popoff. As New

York Times headlines like "Beatniks Flock to Nepal" and "A Baedeker of Beatnik Territory" indicated, the Beat Generation had sent people and a message out of America, often to a reception as hostile as that of the New York City Police. Rome police harassed students on the Spanish Steps, the Cuban government deported Allen Ginsberg for his sexual outspokenness, and the Czechs did the same after Prague students elected Allen "King of the May." Though inspired by On the Road, these early "hippies," long of hair, short of cash, but full of psychedelic joy, were to Jack never more than a conformist stereotype. The road was no longer his but theirs, and he gave it up for a plane at Orly Airport and a flight to St. Petersburg.

Just after he returned to Florida, Jack sat at the typewriter for a week with a bottle of Cognac at his side and produced a new work, "Satori in Paris." It was the first time he'd written while drinking, and it showed. "Satori in Paris" was written out of a paroxysm of reflex, like a sad borscht circuit comic telling the same joke for the seventeenth year. His old religious message of tenderness he now extended to himself as well--"have pity on us all, and don't get mad at me for writing." It was, Jack thought, a "tale that's told for no other reason but companionship, which is another (and my favorite) definition of literature."[6]

Florida he tolerated with weeks of quiet sipping at home interrupted by rowdy bar binges, and the month after his return he found new friends and a new bar. One was Cliff Anderson, a student at the University of South Florida (USF) in nearby Tampa who had met Jack in a St. Pete bar and become a close beer buddy. The sort of unpredictable fellow who scraped through his courses and was often brighter than his teachers, Cliff swept Jack off to Tampa's Wild Boar Tavern on the night after its August 1 opening. The Wild Boar was a low rent beer and wine joint owned by a recently fired USF speech teacher named Gerard Wagner, and his problems with the college administration had followed Gerard off campus. On the night of Jack's visit, the local Sheriff raided the place and arrested him, although he was quietly asleep in Cliff's car out front. As Gerard soon realized, Jack was a man who "invested much committment in simple acts," and was most gratified when Gerard bailed him out of the Hillsborough County Jail a few hours later.

Aside from the gesture and the accident of his name, Gerard was an exceptionally interesting man, a richly endowed specimen who stood 6' 4", had an imposing belly and told wonderful stories in a charming Cajun accent.

Once a month Jack would find a ride to Tampa and spend four or five days in nonstop drinking at the Boar, accented by word perfect reproductions of W. C. Fields' film The Bank Dick and bombastic put-ons of the young English pro-

fessors who dropped by to debate him. Like Allen, Gerard discounted Jack's occasionally rascist maunderings because they were completely separate from his behavior; he was, Gerard felt, "the most democratic guy I ever knew," a classic good fellow and mate.

Perhaps because he feared them so much, Jack was cruel only to women. When a groupie approached him at the bar, he would turn on his still enormous charm, lead her on, and at the moment where he might otherwise have said "Your place or mine," he would assault her with insults like "Your cunt stinks." In his baggy hobo pants, flannel shirt, and Lowell Tech windbreaker, Jack was popular among the rowdy characters in the other local bars, where his outrageous crudity seemed colorfully normal, even as the English professors winced.

After the Boar closed at one in the morning, Jack usually spent the night--he rarely slept during a binge, and then only a cat nap--at Gerard's place on a lake outside of town, and so came to dub his friend "Chevalier Gerard Alvin Sanglier du Lac," (Sir Gerard Alvin the Wild Boar of the Lake). To the sonorous jug-a-rum of the croaking frogs, the two men would talk, of women--Jack said often that he'd loved only Ailene Lee and Mary Carney--and the music of his young manhood, for Jack owned every record Bird Parker had ever made. An interesting and creative man in his own right, Gerard was inspired by Jack, who "would lead

you to thoughts, memories, you'd never otherwise know," and never more than the night they read Shakespeare's Henry IV, Gerard as Falstaff and Jack as Hal, and he suddenly realized that Jack was not reading, but reciting his parts from memory.

Gerard asked about Jack's writing, and though Jack defended himself against the critics--"I'm not a spokesman for a bunch of hoods. I'm a novelist in the great French narrative tradition"--he never talked about his own work. Because of the massive emotional paralysis of his writer's block, Jack had turned from the solitary act of writing to the direct communication of talk. The two modes contradicted each other; a village idiot at center stage was the show, and could not be the recording eye. Though Jack's wit taught those who might listen, it only depleted his writer's stock of images and sounds.

Memories had always been Jack's primary resource, and that fall he received a letter that stirred them up most painfully. After camping in the Sierras with Gary Snyder, Allen had returned to the Bay Area to join Neal and his lady Anne, Ken Kesey, Peter Orlovsky and his brother Julius, and Carolyn in Los Gatos. In the nostalgic revelry of a party among old friends, they sat down and wrote a group letter to their missing family member Jack. Allen cheerfully reported Snyder's remark that "I finally got a climbing companion [in Allen]," Carolyn assured Jack that

she'd loved Desolation Angels "best of all," but Neal's scribbles were disturbing. His handwriting had always been difficult to decipher, but now it careened jerkily over the page like the footprints of a drunk. Cassady pleaded for Jack to allow him to publish their letters, for "Carolyn and the kiddies." "If only you'll say yes I'll be overjoyed, if now you say no, well fuck it all then man, fuck it all." The day after the party ended, Jack phoned Carolyn, somehow unaware of the Cassadys' divorce or the passage of time. "Who answered that phone," he growled at her. "I'll kill him--got my machete right here."

"That's [my son] John, Jack."

At last convinced that it was his name-sake, Kerouac looked for his whiskey, couldn't find it and blamed Memere, "that damned ole alcoholic," then began to tell Carolyn in graphic sexual detail what he'd do if she were with him. "But I won't marry you as long as Neal's alive," Jack mumbled. "We gotta wait till the halls of Nirvana like I said in Big Sur. You're Neal's wife, an' you better not come knockin' on my do'," his voice assuming the "cracker" accent of his deepest drunkenness, "lessen you got that death certificate in yo han', y'heah?"[7] Carolyn said nothing, for there was no possible response to these ravings. After a while, she made her excuses, said good-night, and hung up.

Haunted by the way his past grew more and more far

away, Jack continued to travel, and although he couldn't afford it, he visited Old Saybrook and Lowell in November. Holmes was shocked both by his drinking, which ceased only when he achieved unconsciousness, and with his gross lack of cleanliness, so unlike his old fastidious self. Bored and lackadaisical in Florida, Jack quietly gave in when Memere, bitterly lonely without Nin, demanded that they return north.

In May of 1966 they moved to 20 Bristol Avenue, Hyannis, on Cape Cod. The bars were no different there, and Tony Sampas periodically visited with friends from Lowell. One friend was a psychiatrist named Jacob Roseman, who stopped to visit that summer and was astonished when Jack wouldn't allow him and his wife to leave, but put up Mrs. Roseman in his own bed and sat up all night talking with the Doctor. Though Memere grew disgusted--"I doan like dem dere fags runnin' around de house naked"--Jack spoke gently of Allen, agreeing that he envied Ginsberg's fame although he still rejected him as a "false prophet" and a "show-off hung up on glory."

Later when Memere was asleep he admitted frankly that he'd had sex with Allen once or twice, even as he threw a knife at the wall to irritate his mother. Enveloped by a "larger than life character of astounding erudition and honesty," Roseman left Hyannis a little saddened. As he'd prepared to go the next morning, he asked Jack, "What

is it you want out of life most of all?"

"That God be justified," Jack replied, and snapped the cap off the Anacin bottle that served as his whiskey flask to take another sip.

Late in the night Jack would call Holmes to urge him to visit "and we'll bat out an article and make some bucks," then launch into brilliant orations, talking at John, not with him, wondering who Jack Kerouac was any more, and why his life had ended up the way it had. With a giggle, Jack would hang up after first challenging John to call back, a little test to see whether or not anyone cared any more. Few besides Holmes did; Jack's literary fame had gotten Satori in Paris printed in successive issues of Evergreen Review that spring, but on the whole he was passé; when a Boston University graduate student named Ann Charters offered to compile a bibliography of his work for the Phoenix Book Shop he was grateful for the attention. Charters was shocked by his flabbiness and drinking, but impressed with his memory as she recorded the various editions of his books, a scribe paying homage to a Bard.

Disaster struck once more in September 1966, when Memere had a stroke which left her totally paralyzed except, Jack said, for "her asshole and her mouth." He tried to be flippant about it, but he was racked with grief and worry,

pacing about their dark little house only to fall into tears when he saw his mother's dustily unused sewing basket. A broken spirited orphan, Jack searched for help in his past, in Lowell and Stella Sampas, who had long been the only woman with whom he could communicate.

Stella was a darkly attractive woman, and beyond being Sammy's sister, she was a steadfast and comforting influence in Jack's life. He had known her for many years now, and as he lost contact with Carolyn and Neal, Allen and Lucien, the duration of his life with the Sampases became increasingly meaningful. Seventeen years before--prior to his marriage to Joan Haverty--Jack had asked Stella to marry him, but she had had the youngest Sampas brothers and sisters to help raise. Over the succeeding years she had read his books and stayed in touch, and now when Jack asked a second time, Stella said yes. On November 19, 1966, Jack and Stella were married by the Hyannis Justice of the Peace.[8]

Thirty-two years after soul-brother Sammy had died at Anzio, Jack had become a member of the Sampas Family, united in the sacrament--even if it had been a civil ceremony--of marriage. An ancient facet of his life had been fulfilled.

CHAPTER XVIII

IT'S TRUE: YOU CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN

> And I have a recurrent dream of simply walking around the deserted twilight streets of Lowell, in the mist, eager to turn every known and fabled corner. A very eery, recurrent dream, but it always makes me happy when I wake up.
>
> Jack Kerouac

> Kerouac came back to Lowell after all those years making scenes, and that has scared me crazy . . . Come back to Lowell even though nobody goes anywhere from there, he must have come back to die, that's the only thing makes sense . . . Stopped writing he did, just sat there in crummy Lowell with beer and idleness and the Lowell Sun at four in the afternoon, delivered by the local altar boy at Saint Ann's . . . Christ Kerouac, you're blowing my mind living in Lowell, will you never go back to Big Sur? . . . You stay here, you're as good as dead baby.
>
> Ray Mungo

By January of 1967, Jack's world had come to center on a back table at Nikky's Bar on Gorham Street, Lowell. After several drunk and disorderly arrests on the Cape, he and his family moved to Lowell, settling in a comfortable suburban ranch home at 271 Sanders Avenue, a considerable distance from old Pawtucketville. When he wasn't at home, Jack lived at Nikky's, where the owner Nick Sampas was one of his many brothers-in-law and the night manager was Tony Sampas. The jukebox had plenty of old jazz on it, and he could run a tab without questions. He was comfortable there; Gorham Street was Lowell's skid row, and Nikky's was flanked by a diner straight out of "Little Caesar," while across the

block winos littered the stoop. As a new customer would step into the bar, Jack would shout from the back of the room, frantic to start a conversation, to make some sort of human contact from the lonely universe of self that whirled like a tornado around him, a cloud so filled with thoughts that he was lost, didn't know how or where to begin.

The old friends with whom he had once shared his life--Allen, Gary Snyder, Phil Whalen, Michael McClure, Neal--were far away, and involved in a creative cultural rebellion from which Jack excluded himself, although his work had helped to initiate it.

Three thousand miles from Jack in space and a million miles in spirit, tribes of flower-bedecked American pilgrims came together in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park. They travelled from Berkeley and Haight-Ashbury, Madison and Boulder and Taos, and on January 13, 1967, they gathered for the "Great Human Be-In," hippie angels celebrating life. They were the direct heirs of _On the Road_ and _The Dharma Bums_ and _Howl_. Peter Berg, a member of the San Francisco Mime Troupe and one of the anarchist Diggers then spreading true communism in Haight-Ashbury, had journeyed to San Francisco after reading _Howl_. Steve Levine, editor of San Francisco's first psychedelic newspaper _The Oracle_, had organized poetry readings at the Gaslight Cafe in New York with Ginsberg before

he emigrated to the Bay Area. Digger Peter Cohon, Ron Thelin, the "hip capitalist" owner of the "Psychedelic Shop," Janis Joplin, Jerry Garcia--each acknowledged their roots in a prior "Beat Generation." The Great Human Be-In was a celebration of self, a free-form mandala of human life in which the "audience" was the creator; the organized stimulus for the event came from the San Francisco poets. Allen Ginsberg, Lenore Kandel, and Gary Snyder met at Michael McClure's apartment with a local roshi and Tim Leary to plan a celebration, and the result was the Be-In, in which a painted and beribboned and smiling crowd of psychic pioneers danced in the park.[1]

Up on the stage, Gary Snyder bent and trilled through a conch shell, the symbol of life, to call the tribes together. Gary had wandered far since Jack had last seen him in 1956. After a year in the Daitoku Monastery, he had worked on an oil tanker from the Pacific to Istanbul, spent 1958-9 in San Francisco, traveled with Allen in India, and returned to Japan to live in a commune on a rural island. He had been back in the U.S. only a short time in January 1967, but as he later told Philip Whalen, it seemed as if "the revolution has happened . . . it's already there, it's already alive . . . LSD has gotten into everyone's hands, everybody's free from all the old clap trap . . . the system is never going to get them back."

Though as yet a virtually unknown poet, Gary had

already assumed his life persona of revolutionary cultural prophet, guide to those free citizens who chose to listen. Over the next years he would publish magnificent poetry like Regarding Wave or the Pulitzer Prize-winning Turtle Island, as well as the seminal essays in Earth House Hold. His message was urgent yet simple; save life. Passing through New York before the Be-In, he cited Chief Joseph and the Dalai Lama as his heroes and suggested that New York City be leveled and made into a buffalo pasture. What he was after was a fusion of Western-style social revolution and Eastern "individual insight into the basic self / void." Wild free nature, coyote and chipmunk and algae, was still at the center of his prophecy:

> If civilization
> is the exploiter, the masses is nature.
> And the party
> is the poets.

Many poets--Ginsberg, McClure, Rexroth, Ferlinghetti--followed his lead into a new concern for the ecology; Allen's psychedelic poem "Wales Visitation" expressed the systematic unity of life, and Ferlinghetti sang the hope that the "new race of longhaired golden progeny descending from on high in Jefferson Airplanes" might yet save nature from the technocracy. Their most influential disciple was a poet of a different medium, a man named Stewart Brand. A former denizen of North Beach and a Merry Prankster, Brand

reflected years later that "I owe everything to [the Beats] and still do." Brand tried to apply the prophecy by creating The Whole Earth Catalogue to give practical access to tools for the pilgrims of an ecologically sane life style, then wheedled out of NASA the first picture of the whole earth in space, blue and green and white and beautiful, a single perfect image of what all the poetry meant: Life is one, the circle cannot be broken.[2]

Jack's life was now limited to Memere and Stella, a bottle and a bar. He sat in Nikky's and roared out a spray of words he often didn't mean, the monologue of a disassociated consciousness that was a jumble of brilliance out of focus, a surreal portrait that required great effort to understand. As he sat there, his finger constantly tracing a cross in a puddle of beer on his table, he'd try to pump old bums for information--"What's your story?"--or evaluate Bach and Beethoven with bartender Walter Full, Nick Sampas' German-born father-in-law. Sometimes Jack would ramble through a few mournful stories about the way the world was changing to John Mahoney, the bouncer. Mahoney was an ordinary working Lowellite, a tough--Jack liked tough guys, because they were more honest--cop who liked Kerouac, thought "he stood for something," but never quite comprehended the writer's strangeness, and often wondered

if anyone really knew his depths. Most Lowell opinions of Jack were less gentle; the consensus at Nikky's dismissed him as a "crazy asshole dreamer drunk." One typical young man was quietly sitting over a beer at Nikky's when he recognized Jack, who had approached him for a talk. "He was real drunk and was telling all sorts of stories. But they didn't mean much to me and I just sort of tried to get rid of him. After a while, I gave up and split." Flight was a common reaction.

When the barflies of Lowell ran away, Jack could turn to his relatives and old friends, but neither were very satisfactory as mates. Jack usually saw his relatives--cousin Herve and his wife Doris and cousin Armand and his family--in the mornings when he was still essentially sober, and they would reminisce about childhood baseball games or talk gloomily of local politics. Herve was a railroad man and Armand was a butcher, and they had little in common with their notorious relative. Armand in particular was confused by Jack, and on one hand denounced his work--"No literature in his books, no grammar . . . I could do it"--while at the same time he defended Jack to reporters by swearing that "He was not a drunk." Family was Memere's department in any case.

Jack's childhood friends avoided him. GJ Apostalakis felt that he was "a different person," Scotty Beaulieu was enraged at what "those New York fellas did to him," and Fred Bertrand thought he was a failure. "He could have been

a professional man," Fred said later, "but he missed the boat." Once when Fred met Jack on the street, Kerouac was so dazed by whiskey that he mistook Fred's son for Fred, and Bertrand turned away disgusted.[3]

So Jack had mostly new friends, and besides Tony Sampas, the closest was Joe Chaput, a smilingly gentle, gravel-voiced man in his mid-thirties. Built short and ruggedly stocky, Joe was a Merrimack College graduate who discussed Pascal and Kierkegaard, and a widower free to trek through the night as a drinking companion. One night in January 1967, Joe wandered into Nikky's, spotted the man whose books he'd read, and approached Jack. "Always glad to buy a starving author a drink," Joe cracked, and Jack accepted. As their conversation ripened, Joe inquired as to who "Maggie Cassidy" had been, and when Jack replied that it was Mary Carney, he smiled; "I went out with her." Jack chortled and leaped out of his chair, shouting, "Now I KNOW you're a bullshit specialist, come on let's go see her!" Mary turned them away at her door, so they went home to Sanders Avenue where Stella was leery of a new drinking buddy but Memere was charmed with a polite and gallant Frenchman, particularly when it turned out that Joe's cousin had once been her neighbor.

Even Stella, who had taken to hiding Jack's shoes in an effort to keep him home and moderately sober--he frequently went out barefoot--soon took a liking to Chaput,

and he became one of the family. He and Jack would listen to Bird Parker on the tape recorder late at night or chat with Memere of the old days, or make the round of the bars, Nikky's or the Blue Moon or the Peppermint Lounge, seeking that something, the anything, that would be meaningful.

In the bars, Jack opened up his soul with Chaput, spoke deeply of his life and his regrets, about how he should have completed Columbia, should have stayed in the Navy although "I couldn't take it." "Tell me about your bomber runs over Germany," Jack would wheedle, and they'd be lost in memories, only to surface in Vietnam. Though Jack detested the ragged, flag-burning "rabble" that opposed the war, he was appalled by the killing in Vietnam, and dourly argued that it was caused by the machinations of "big money," a plot for Vietnam to grow rich on America. The two men would slam into the house at three in the morning, Jack bellowing out, "I'm home, Stella," and then sit drinking for hours as Jack contemplated his legend aloud.

He loved Lowell, he told Chaput, but had been estranged by his fear of becoming a "mill rat" like most of the other French young men. After forty-one years, he still missed his brother Gerard, and muttered tearfully, "You're my brother, Joe." As the nights passed he spoke of the critics who had never understood the beatific meaning of "Beat," of his psychedelic experience with Tim Leary, a frightening descent into lostness that Kerouac

now swore had ruined him. "I haven't been right since," he confided. Of his friends he was nasty only about Allen, who "stole my ideas," and what Joe called his "Jewish thing" popped up again and again. Burroughs' imagination still intrigued Jack, and he praised him to Joe with the recommendation, "Man, that guy can write some weird stuff."

Cruising around Lowell with Tony or Joe or Manual "Chiefy" Nobriga, Kerouac would latch on to someone--anyone--and delve into their life, try to absorb and appreciate their passage through the years. When a member of a motorcycle gang complained that he and his friends were being harassed by the police, Jack recorded the conversation on Chiefy's tape machine and promised to write a publicity article for the "bikers." Everyone was fair game for his eye and tongue, although he said he liked Greeks especially, "'cause they created Gods with weaknesses like people."[4] Every person he encountered became an audience for Jack as he lampooned hypocrisy, pomposity and fraud as he saw it. He shared with Jackson Pollock the fate of colossal ambivalence, a mixture of soaring ego--Pollock said, "You know, there are only three painters; Picasso, Matisse, and Pollock," Jack compared himself to Melville and Shakespeare--and colossal feelings of failure, artists who cried tears of abject unworthiness for their art and their world. For both men, fame had come too late, and with too many strings attached. Greg Zahos was one of Jack's young companions,

and one thing about his hero disquieted him; Jack smiled often, but he rarely laughed any more.

At home Jack drank quietly--he kept cases of Johnny Walker Red in the basement--still writing although the results were never cohesive enough to satisfy him. His room was inviolate, a cell that he cleaned himself and from which he barred all visitors, even Stella. Old movies on TV fascinated him, particularly John Ford epics that made him cheer for the Indians. The Kerouacs owned a piano and he plunked away on it, and there was the Bible or Pascal to read. When the loneliness grew too painful he'd pick up the telephone and call Carolyn or John or Allen. Finally Stella had to disconnect it because the bills were too high.

When he did leave home, bars were not his only destination. Often at dusk he'd take a stroll and slip into Notre Dame de Louge church, light a candle, and pray. Though he urged his friend Billy Koumantzelis' son to go to parochial school, he had no formal contact with the Church, did not attend Mass and almost never spoke of churches or priests. But he was always aware of his life's spiritual realities, and nightly he prayed to Christ, to Gerard, to Leo, to all the passionate sufferers of the earth for an end to his own suffering, the extinction of his own nightmare.

In the spring of 1967 Jack overcame his writing block and wrote "Vanity of Duluoz," a heartbreaking last effort as an author. He was tired now, and could write only eight thousand words at a sitting before he had to rest for a week, so it took from March until May to complete the ninety-three foot teletype roll. His prose had lost some of its elasticity, and the tone was often sour--"Inso- far as nobody loves my dashes anyway," he wrote, "I'll use regular punctuation for the new illiterate generation."

But the essence of "Vanity of Duluoz" was shocking and gallant and at one with his life-long devotion to the Muse at the expense of his personal happiness; he restated his young life from the perspective of the death angel, portrayed his life from the final curving facet of death and brought it to an end through his art. From a mental grave he dismissed his young adventures, from heroic football to his life at sea, as "Vanity." In the Buddhist sense he destroyed his early illusions, wreaked havoc on his own early romanticism with a combination of paranoia and humor that labelled himself a "wise guy" for messing up in the Navy, for "I could have gained a lot out of loyal membership to that outfit, learned a trade maybe, gotten out of the stupid 'literary' deadend I find myself trapped in now." When he left football in 1941, he "was telling

everybody to go jump in the big fat ocean of their own folly. I was also telling myself to go jump in the big fat ocean of my own folly . . . what a bath!"

As Jack wrote "Vanity of Duluoz," a Yaqui Indian shaman named Don Juan Mateus told anthropologist Carlos Castaneda that "controlled folly" was the proper path of a warrior.[5] Though Jack had little control over his life, he saw its folly, the emptiness of vanity and ambition. There was a still too ambitious shrillness in his voice when he defended his record and treatment as a football player, and a nostalgic mourning for old America as compared to the 1967 "potboiler of broken convictions, messes of rioters fighting in the streets, hoodlumism, cynical administration of cities and states, suits and neckties the only feasible subject, grandeur all gone into the mosaic mesh of Television." But his real subject was death, the systematic disillusionment of his life for his art, a lyric preparation for the end that left him drained and empty.

That fall three young men, his old hero William Saroyan's son Aram among them, came to interview Jack for The Paris Review. Sparring with their questions, Kerouac continued in a deprecatory vein to preach of simplicity and clarity, disparaging intellectualism; "God, man, I rode around this country free as a bee," he told Saroyan. Later in the year, critic Bruce Cook elicited the same anti-abstract reply when he tried to apply sociology to

the Beats. "And I wasn't trying to create any kind of new consciousness or anything like that," Jack snorted to Cook, sitting in Nikky's Bar. "We didn't have a whole lot of heavy abstract thoughts. We were just a bunch of guys who were out trying to get laid."

In both the Paris Review interview and his conversation with Cook, he goofed and wandered, momentarily serious on the role of the writer with Cook--"Let me tell you, a true writer should be an observer and not go around being observed, like Mailer and Ginsberg," Jack proclaimed. "Observing--that's the duty and oath of a writer." Intuition that transcended technique was still his way; "FEELING is what I like in art," he told Saroyan, "not CRAFTINESS and the hiding of feelings." When Saroyan asked him why he'd never written a book about Jesus, Jack exploded, "You insane phony . . . All I write about is Jesus. I am Everhard Mercurian, General of the Jesuit Army." He spoke at length to the Paris Review trio about the Iroquois and his Cornish roots, Buddhism, Kaspya and the flower sermon, and was affectionate about Allen and Gregory as he complained of the distortion of "Beat" by West Coast leftists. Of himself he admitted to Saroyan that "Frankly, I do feel that my mind is going," and perhaps etched his own literary epitaph as well: "Notoriety and public confession in literary form is a frazzler of the heart you were born with, believe me."[6]

Ironically, the very fact that he was being inter-

viewed was a sign not only of pleasant literary respect but a mark of the ultimate success of his style; by the middle 1960s and after, the nakedly direct oral confession of the interview had become a primary form of journalism. As well, the "New Journalism" had swept the literary world. As John Holmes argued, it directly paralleled Jack's style, for in it "the consciousness of a writer is the protagonist." While almost all fifties magazine articles had been rigidly narrative in format, in the sixties writers increasingly accepted the Beat emphasis on the personal, confessional view, and became more subjective, more spontaneous in tone and approach. Village Voice columnist Jill Johnston had come to Manhattan to be a "beatnik," and replaced her formal dance criticism with a surrealistic subjective commentary on her own life, as did Charles Bukowski, whose Los Angeles Free Press column was a direct descendent of Kerouac.

In cultural realms far beyond writing styles, the Beats had been forerunners of a major American cultural shift in the late 1960s and early 1970s that rejected traditional "masculinity." The resistance to the liberal-rational world view was embodied in the departure from private psychoanalysis to public, confessional, consciousness raising and encounter groups, a turning away from "logic" in a mad world to values born of emotional openness and sensitivity in supra-rational disciplines like Zen, Yoga, meditation,

astrology and the occult. By the time it happened, it was too late for Jack, for nothing mattered greatly to a man who had obliterated the most precious images of his life for one more book.

Still searching for a meaningful past, Jack talked Joe Chaput into a summer vacation trip to the just-opened Expo '67 Fair in Montreal, with a stop at Riviere du Loupe to examine some parish records on the Kerouac family. On the road once more in his customary shotgun seat with a bottle of brandy in his hand, Jack sang old bop songs with happy abandon, but his faith in the journey soon leaked away. Once in Riviere du Loupe, Jack was so drunk and decrepit that Joe fretted about his going into the motel bar, and even after Jack cleaned up he caused trouble when he launched into his tired lecture on the purity of Quebec French and how "the Jews have corrupted the language in France." A local Jewish citizen became angry enough that Joe had to shepherd Jack away.

Some of Jack's habits--his prudish modesty for example--hadn't changed at all. Though he was in dire need of a bathroom, Jack could not bring himself to urinate in a country store toilet screened only by a thin cloth curtain. When he began to relate an elaborate tale to two young women hitchhikers about his visit to the famous New Orleans brothel the "House of the Rising Son," Jack quoted the Madame, who had told him, "Boy, I'm gonna teach you what lust is." Then

he stopped, blushing at the idea of being sexually explicit in front of young women. He never reached the Riviere du Loupe parish church, nor did he and Joe visit Montreal. After playing pool in a roadside bar with some sailors, they returned to Massachusetts and wound up in Boston's sex district, the "Combat Zone," for more drinks and more pool, Jack growing more abusive as their journey came to an end. The road always leads inward, and Jack's interior reality could no longer respond to adventure.[7]

As 1967 wore out, his money problems became grim. Sterling Lord had sold "Vanity of Duluoz" to Coward-McCann, one chapter on football from it to Sports Illustrated and the chapter on David Kammerer's death to Evergreen Review (which ran it with essays by Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and Regis Debray). Another short piece, "In the Ring," went to Atlantic. But the Johnny Walker and the mortgage and Memere's medical bills absorbed his advances, and Jack wanted desperately to accept when Professor Charles Jarvis offered him a position as writer-in-residence at Lowell Tech. There were emotional as well as financial considerations; the building he would teach in was part of Dr. Sax, just one block from his Sarah Ave. adolescence. Though one couldn't teach anyone how to write, Jack thought it possible to teach the relationship of great literature to its time. He got a haircut and assured the Professor that he was ready to face the students. He wasn't. The day before he was to give a preliminary lec-

ture, Stella called and begged Jarvis to release Jack from his pledge, for in his fear of performing Kerouac had drunk himself into a stupor.

It was more than a classroom that disturbed him. Jarvis was of upwardly mobile middle-class Lowell, a smoothly prosperous striver whom Jack regularly addressed as "You professor weirdo." Jack lectured regularly on literature to those who would listen, like Jay Pendergast, a Doctoral candidate in Irish literature at Trinity College in Dublin who'd returned to Lowell to earn a stake for his research. When Jarvis sauntered in and pompously asked Jack "What was the influence of Joyce on your work," Jack retorted "Go fuck yourself." The one occasion Jack did enter a classroom in Lowell it was a disaster.

After an all-night binge with Greg Zahos, a young substitute teacher at Lowell High School, Jack decided to teach Greg's class in English literature. Chewing gum to cover his breath, he bought a cheap shirt and pair of pants to replace the rags of his debauched evening, but he still looked like a slob. Though he entranced the class with an uproarious performance of Moby Dick, afterwards the high school football coach cornered him in the hall and ordered him to leave the premises. "I saved your school once against Lawrence," Jack plaintively volunteered, "don't you remember that?" Coach didn't care; thirty years had passed since that wonderful Thanksgiving of

1938, when Jack had been a hero.[8]

The dreams of Jack's life winked out one by one. The crucial dream, the most important vision, had always been Neal. In February 1968 Cassady was nearing forty-two, and the breath of age was at his neck. "I get in a group," he told Carolyn, "and everyone just stares at me, expecting me to perform . . . and my nerves are so shot, I get high . . . and there I go again, I don't know what else to do." The previous December he'd been at Kesey's farm in Oregon in the midst of the usual ecstatic chaos when he was suddenly swept by terror; rushing into the cold night without cigarettes or a coat, he hitchhiked to San Francisco, where Carolyn picked him up and brought him home. There Cassady peered into his son John's empty room and panicked again, began to cry and screamed out, "My God, I've killed my son, I've killed my son," then hid in the shower and pounded on the walls until exhaustion put him to sleep.

In January 1968 he traveled to Los Angeles. Overwhelmed once more with fear, he called Carolyn and beseeched her to take him back: "I am coming <u>home</u>." Carolyn said "No" and advised him to calm down his various police problems with a stay in Mexico before he returned.

One afternoon in San Miguel de Allende, Neal

attended a fiesta. The tequila flowed freely, and he swallowed a few Seconals as well, got into an argument with his girlfriend and huffily took off to walk along the railroad tracks. He walked until he collapsed and died.

Carolyn called on Memere's birthday, February 4, 1968, to break the news to Jack, but he would not believe her. Sober and gentle, he comforted Carolyn, whispered all the right and beautiful things he could about her and Neal, but in the end he swore that, "Neal's not dead you know, he couldn't be. Naw, he's hiding out somewhere, Africa maybe." Jack's voice rose, fell, and ended in a sob, "He can't be dead."[9]

As if to defy the fate that had snuffed out his brother, Jack set out on another voyage in March, this time to Portugal, Spain, and Germany. Incapable of traveling alone, Jack went with Tony and Nick Sampas and some other friends; Tony was a gentle bodyguard to keep him out of trouble, a large spirited and compassionate man who did not get embarrassed when Jack behaved oafishly. At the airport Jack discovered that his friend Greg Zahos' fiancee Georgette and her two children by a previous marriage would accompany them on the flight to Spain.

During the monotonous transatlantic flight, Georgette grew irritated with her fretful children and brusquely ordered them to go to sleep. Jack tenderly remonstrated with her, murmuring, "Don't tell them, just love them."

Gazing at the mother and children, he spoke in the wake of a recent scene with Memere that had brought their relationship to a head. In the middle of a shrieking argument with his mother, Jack had shrugged and snapped, "I don't want to fuck you, it's okay, relax." Memere had once pointed at the crucifix on her wall when friends of Jack had visited her home and hissed, "Jesus is in my house, no sex here, no sex." Now she spat at him, "Don't use that word . . . you're just like your father," and continued bitterly, "he tried me and tried me." She added fiercely, "and he wasn't that good."

As if his love for his mother was genuine, and her love had grown twisted and corrupt, Jack urged Georgette to be kind to her children--"Don't discipline them, talk softly to them . . . above all, don't be selfish with them, don't use them, because," and he spoke with an especial tone of authority at that point, "you women have a special understanding about kids." Trapped in a sticky web of love and guilt for the woman who had betrayed that love, Jack could not detach himself from Memere, but only endure her hateful need for him. After asking permission, he gently kissed Georgette on her cheek, and returned to his seat.

This vacation was an alcoholic duplication of the 1965 stay in Paris, but instead of buying sex from a prostitute Jack hired a woman in Portugal to stare into his eyes for an hour, as if to make a contact that was more real than the robotic gymnastics of a trick. The rest of his

travels were equally bizarre. With his bankroll securely knotted in a handkerchief, he went out to talk with common people while his companions dined at fancy restaurants. The Germans depressed him with their stolid seriousness, and by the time Jack reached Stuttgart he was tired and ready to return to the United States, nine hundred dollars in debt for a futile journey at a time when his income was around sixty dollars a week.[10]

When the Washington Post offered him a large advance that summer for an essay on contemporary affairs, it was no surprise that he accepted with alacrity, and turned out a piece called "After Me, the Deluge." As he wrote, the war in Vietnam stormed on unabated, and the nation writhed like an animal smashing itself to pieces in its own death throes. Jack's old school Columbia University had been torn apart by a student strike in May. Assassins had cut down Martin Luther King Jr. in April and Bobby Kennedy in June. The feeling of apocalypse was in the air, and its near approximation was the frenzy of the late August Chicago Police Department riot during the Democratic Nominating Convention there. Caught in the middle, Jack was frozen between the politicians and the demonstrators, more an outsider than ever before.

Denying that he was "the great white father and intellectual forebear who spawned a deluge of alienated radicals," he cried out in "After Me" that he was instead

the "intellectual forebear of modern spontaneous prose," an artist, and that was all. Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin and the Yippies were not spontaneous, he told Ginsberg, but egotistical and vainglorious, and served only as "new reasons for spitefulness." Eight years later Rubin would agree completely with that evaluation.

Yet Jack found the sleekly groomed upper class of American society equally unsympathetic to his private memories of grimy depression breadlines and scruffy soldiers in foxholes. To Jack, every establishment smile or round of applause was "shiny hypocrisy," "political lust and concupiscience, a ninny's bray of melody backed by a ghastly neurological drone of money-glut." The dissidents were "quite understandably alienated nay disgusted by this scene," but had "no better plan to offer the grief stricken American citizens but fund raising dinners of their own." The students were barbaric McLuhanites who did not "believe in the written word which is the only way to keep the record straight," Learyite acid heads who could not address an envelope, Maoist "parasites" who manipulated people quite as much as the police. In a divided country, Jack dwelled in a chasm all his own.[11]

Later in the fall of 1968 Jack again found himself lonely in the middle when he appeared on William F. Buckley's "The Firing Line" television program flanked by a "hip" sociologist named Lewis Yablonsky and Ed Sanders, an East Village

poet, publisher of Fuck You, A Magazine of the Arts, and member of the "Fugs," a perverse rock and roll band. Although he read William F. Buckley regularly--they were both graduates of Horace Mann School--Jack hadn't really wanted to do the show at all, but Memere thought it was a splendid idea, and Jack did want to see Sterling Lord. With Joe Chaput as driver and Billy Koumantzelis and Paul Bourgeois as outriders, Kerouac rode to New York and a strangely significant reunion. After some light drinking, Jack and his Lowell friends found themselves in William S. Burroughs' room at the Hotel Delmonico talking with Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, and Lucien Carr. It was the first time since 1953 that the Beat circle of friends had been united.

Burroughs was still a teacher, but his audience and frame of reference had grown tremendously. In search of techniques to disrupt the manipulative nature of life in the western world, he had investigated yoga, karate, and the use of sense withdrawal, stroboscopic lights, and sound manipulation to break the conventional lines of intellectual and sensual association. His own "cutups," randomly joined scissored pieces of manuscript, were designed to crack reality by creating a new reality in the space between the juxtaposed fragments. The world of The Soft Machine or The Wild Boys was nothing like the Aristotelian either-or mindset Americans took for granted. Misogynous and still bitterly witty, Burroughs was out, as he said, "to make people aware

of the true criminality of our times, to wise up the marks," and to make them high, "high as the Zen master is high when his arrow hits a target in the dark . . . high as the karate master is high when he smashes a brick with his fist." The fulfilled student was weightless in space, and "this is the space age. Time to look beyond this run down radioactive cop rotten planet."

Wearing a tie beneath his dressing gown, Bill was his usual dryly dignified self as he warned Jack not to appear on Buckley's television program and corrected Jack's memory when they reminisced about events now a quarter of a century past. When it came time for everyone to leave for the television studio, he would not accompany them, but was content to say good-bye to Jack at the door of his room before he returned to his solitary sorcery.[12]

As Jack left for the studio to tape the Buckley program, he begged Allen Ginsberg to come along; gracious as always with his "older brother," Allen agreed. Carrying the harmonium he used to accompany himself when he chanted, Allen was a poet whose work, he thought, was "a kind of record of the times . . . useful in that it helps clarify the present." Allen's verse was a transcription of his naked mind, a form of meditation based on his understanding that "Mind is shapely, art is shapely." Howl had sold 260,000 copies by now, but Allen wrote less and less, preoccupied by a cultural revolution. His bedroom bulletin board was crowded

with an election meeting notice from the local reform Democratic club, a poster from a Fellowship of Reconcilation rally, a "Fuck for Peace" banner, and a Zen flower scroll, and that variety only hinted at his interests.

The next year he would recommend as teachers in a Playboy interview Barry Commoner on ecology, Gregory Bateson on technical ideas, Paul Goodman on the reorganization of community, the Diggers on communes, Aldous Huxley on psychedelic drugs, Gary Snyder on the concept of tribe and Burroughs on educational systems, all of these perspectives designed to "include a larger consciousness in [the] revolution . . . and because of the ecological crisis, any effective revolution that will save the planet will have to include all sentient beings." Jack was wholly uninterested in such ideas, but their meeting was friendly and cheerfully affectionate; they had met twenty-four years before, and since Allen could not pierce Stella and Memere's defenses in Lowell, they were acutely aware of how little time they would have to share with each other.[13]

Before they reached the "Firing Line" studio, Jack stopped at Sterling Lord's Madison Avenue office intent on ending their author-agent relationship, but Lord dissuaded him and he sped across town to the show. Though Stella had ordered Joe Chaput to stop his drinking, Jack picked up a pint of Teacher's Scotch on the way. They shared their elevator ride with Ed Sanders, who was excited to see his old hero

Jack and wanted to talk. Nervous with the approaching ordeal of the television program, Jack was surly and told him to "Get the fuck off my back, kid." When he met Truman Capote--who was taping another "Firing Line" program after them--in the green room backstage, he was more gracious. "I don't care what you said about me," Jack cooed to Capote, "you're all right." Capote was unimpressed. Perhaps he was guiltily aware that In Cold Blood, the book that had established his mature reputation, bore no small debt to the "New Journalism" and the drunk who stood before him.

The red blinking cameras and floodlights and audience of Buckley's TV show frightened Jack, but made little difference; he behaved exactly as he did at Nikky's, a drunkenly honest, subtly funny man who grossly offended Buckley. His tongue slicing the air as his eyebrows bounced like a yoyo, Buckley condescended to Kerouac when he didn't ignore him. Pulling steadily at a coffee mug full of Scotch, Jack nodded off to sleep a couple of times, bored with the panel's intellectualized discussion of their putative topic, "The Hippies." Kerouac commented that it was "apparently some kind of Dionysian movement," and that the hippies were "good kids," then attacked Ferlinghettti for turning the pious and tender beatific idea into "the beat mutiny, the beat insurrection, words I never use, being a Catholic."

Rowdy and disorderly in the staid confines of a TV stage, Jack called sociologist Yablonsky "Abramowitz" and

Sanders accused him of anti-semitism, an accusation seconded by Buckley, who demanded that Jack apologize. "No, no. I thought . . . I forgot his name," said Jack. In a show that was largely windy rhetoric, he made one particularly perceptive observation. Kerouac's opinion of the Chicago riots--that "there are people who make a rule of creating chaos so that once the chaos is underway they can then be elected as the people who take care of the chaos"--would ring frighteningly true in succeeding years when the term "agent-provocateur" entered the American political lexicon.

Jack's saddest moment came when Ed Sanders linked him with Allen. Even though Jack had begged Ginsberg to come to the studio, he growled back at Sanders, "I'm not connected with Ginsberg." As the camera panned over the crowd to settle on Allen, Jack blurted out, "And don't you put my name next to his." Paying no mind to his old friend's confusion, Allen bade Jack farewell on the street corner outside, touched him tenderly and said with a smile, "Goodbye, drunken ghost." Allen never saw him again.[14]

Once back in Lowell, Jack had to move his family once more. Like a wailing, bed-ridden demon, Memere had worn her son down with a non-stop chorus on the joys of Florida sunshine. "I'll be able to walk if we go dere," she promised

him, and although they lost an enormous amount of money on their unnecessarily hasty sale, by November they were ready to head once more for St. Pete.

Perhaps there was a special reason for Jack's swift agreement with Memere; he'd seen a ghost. Late in August yet another hippie woman of sixteen had turned up on Hervé Kerouac's doorstep, because he was the only Kerouac in the telephone directory. Hervé's wife Doris answered the door, and after she took a good look at the hippie's face she listened seriously to her story, dropped everything, and took her to Sanders Avenue.[15]

The hippie's name was Janet Michelle Kerouac, and she was unmistakably Jack's daughter. On the road to Mexico, she had impulsively decided to see her father. Jack was shocked into silence, and said little except to ask her if she'd gotten the money, the twelve dollars a week child support he'd provided. There was no bravado or bluster or denial in him, only stolid acquiesence. Watching her leave, Jack might well have sensed his past--the memories that had always been the rich essence of his life--recede into meaninglessness, as the sweep of his days curved in to an almost visible ending.

C H A P T E R X I X

ENDGAME

Old endgame lost of old, play and
lose and have done with losing.
Samuel Beckett

My throat aches to find my way back to
the place where I am mourned and I can't
even remember any more where that is --
Jack Kerouac

You know, this used to be a really great
country. I wonder what happened to it?
Easy Rider

Having sold his correspondence with Allen Ginsberg to Columbia University in order to finance a new Florida home, Jack climbed into the shotgun seat of a station wagon for yet another journey. Stella, Memere and the cats "Pitou" and "Minette" occupied the rear area, while Joe Chaput and a friend named Red were the drivers. As though he anticipated that he would soon be lonely in St. Petersburg, Jack talked almost continuously during their speedy twenty-four hour ride, shouting and blowing on a harmonica as he reminisced about Joan Vollner Burroughs' death, the time he passed out in a Scollay Square toilet, and his past adventures in Mexico and Tangiers. In St. Petersburg, the Kerouacs liked their new home, a cinder block bungalow with a brick facade, and as they settled in, Jack took out a library card and sat in the back yard reading Voltaire, Mon-

taigne, Pascal, and William F. Buckley's National Review. This stay in Florida was unique. His visits to bars were few; Jack rarely left his home at all.

Lost in St. Pete, the city where the funeral notice list was always twice as long as the birth announcements, the community where the cast-off remnants of the nation gathered to await death, Kerouac seemed almost done for. As a commercial writer he was finished, and though he had well over a dozen published books to his credit he could not get an advance on a new one.[1] The last few reviews had been as bad as ever. Satori in Paris had been termed "credit card sensibility" by the New York Times Book Review and Vanity of Duluoz was a "Road to Nowhere" to the Times, "infantile," a "banal plea for the Good Old Days" to the Sunday Times Review. Time thought Vanity of Duluoz was his "best book," but couched the review in qualifications sufficient to neutralize any pleasure in the opinion. John Holmes contributed a fine essay on the book to the National Observer, but its title indicated Jack's deadend situation: "There's an Air of Finality to Kerouac's Latest."[2]

Jack's utter lack of critical acclaim was made even more painful by the fact that poetry critics had grudgingly but finally capitulated to Allen Ginsberg, who used the methods and insights that Jack had taught him. The reviews of Allen's new book, Planet News, in the spring of 1969 were almost unanimously respectful. Ten years before, Allen had

responded to a particularly nasty review by his former classmate John Hollander, "John, you've just got to drop it, and take me seriously, and listen to what I have to say." In 1968 the two men read together at Columbia and embraced, and positive articles on Allen ran in magazines from Life to Commentary. "The literary world has swung around to [Ginsberg's] way of thinking, not he to theirs," reported the New York Times. Allen had once told the poetry establishment that "we talk about our assholes, and we talk about our cocks, and we talk about who we fucked last night . . . so then--what happens if you make a distinction between what you tell your friends and what you tell your Muse? The problem is to break down that distinction." The Nation agreed: "What Ginsberg forced us to understand in Howl twelve years ago was that nothing is safe from poetry." Soon Allen would receive a National Book Award.3

Allen's publisher City Lights Press had by 1969 published literally dozens of poets and essayists, and not only San Franciscans or Beats; William Carlos Williams, Andrei Voznesensky, Malcolm Lowry, Pablo Picasso, and James Joyce all graced the list, and Ferlinghetti himself was the subject of a New York Times article that acknowledged his significance.

Among the other poets who had been in Donald Allen's The New American Poetry, Robert Creeley, Kenneth Rexroth, and Gregory Corso had all been hired to teach in universities,

their demeanor and poetry untamed. As one poetry critic remarked, "It is not they but the academy that has changed." Perhaps the most amusing evidence of critical capitulation was an article by Louis Simpson, who in 1962 had condemned the Beats as "liars" who appealed only to a "certain devitalized, androgynous type--the male or female spinster." As the decade ended Simpson figuratively stood up before the poetry world and conceded the accession of Allen Ginsberg; the new ancient Master was Allen's William Blake, not the New Critics' John Donne.[4]

William Everson (formerly Brother Antoninus) had been a published poet for nearly twenty years when On the Road hit the bestseller lists, yet to him it "really was a revolution, and it made all the difference." Everson continued: "It had nothing to do with my practice, but my image of myself as a public figure changed from an academic to a bohemian. Rexroth used to jeer that you couldn't tell a poet from a good dentist--he belonged, he conformed, he passed, as they say . . . and the break instituted by the Beat Generation was as much a break in persona, in the poet's image, as it was a break in style and technique, and it was that change in image that made for freedom of expression and self-realization."

A student once asked Allen whether Kerouac was still important. Ginsberg was silent for a moment, then said, "Well, he was the first one to make a new crack in the con-

sciousness." Writers like Pete Hamill and Jimmy Breslin honored Kerouac, but theirs were minority voices.

And so Jack remained at home in lonely obscurity, his unfocused eyes directed at the television set while the record player boomed out Bach or Handel. As the sun beat down with a withering glare, he stayed in his dimly quiet writing room and concentrated on a new book, oblivious to the tinkle of Memere's bell that jerked Stella around like a puppet. Though he was desperately tired, Jack persevered on the new work because the specter of poverty demanded it; the Kerouacs were so poor that Stella had gone to work as a seamstress at $1.70 an hour. He did not have the emotional reserves to begin something new, so he decided to complete a tale he'd begun eighteen years earlier, just after finishing On the Road. It was called "Pic," short for the name of his childhood card baseball game star "Pictorial Review Jackson." It was a simple, gentle tale of a black North Carolina nine-year-old boy, as much dialect study of country Carolina speech as novel.

An acquaintance of Jack's asked whether "Pic" was a story of prejudice, and Jack snorted, "Shit, it's a story of life, of people living." As Jack narrated the story, Pic's grandpa died in 1948, and Pic went to stay with his Aunt Gastonia, a righteous, God-fearing woman who spent much of her time praying in loud shrieks. She was "tedious" as far as Pic was concerned, and life was gloomy

until a most unlikely figure slipped down their backwoods Carolina dirt road, a young man in zoot pants, beret, GI boots, red shirt and goatee, Pic's older brother Slim. A saxophonist who lived in Harlem, Slim heroically spirited his younger brother out of Carolina, down roads with lines and guard rails that the youngun had never seen before, across the Mason-Dixon line and up to New York's 125th St. When Slim's wife Sheila lost her job, the three of them--a true family--decided to strike out for California, Sheila by bus and the men by their thumbs.

There were two endings to "Pic," and they revealed Jack's weary ambivalence about himself as a writer. Originally he ended the tale by having "Dean Moriarity" and "Sal Paradise" of On the Road pick up the hitchhiking Slim and Pic, but Stella objected that the contexts did not meld. Irritated by her criticisms, Jack bolted in a huff to Memere's room and produced a jumbled paste-up in which Slim and Pic encountered the "Ghost of the Susquehanna" from On the Road, then settled (at Memere's suggestion) in a church. That he had taken to accepting literary advice from his mother made it clear that Jack's youthful creativity had long since burned out.

In a rare foray out of his home, Jack visited a local black bar to celebrate the completion of "Pic." When he be-

gan to talk "nigger," to boast of the fine book about Negroes that he'd just written, several of the customers in the bar took him into the parking lot and pounded him senseless. It was not 1948 but October 1969, and the black neighborhoods of Watts, Hough, Newark and Detroit had entered history with riotous images of National Guard tanks rumbling through American streets. It was no longer safe for chubby drunken white men to noisily disturb black bars.[5]

To Jack, public events and the world around him were skewed somehow, not quite right. The underground event of the summer was a film about two men riding across America, but Easy Rider ended with their violent deaths, not Kerouacian satori. A Beat poet made the news again, but Hugh Romney helped run the music festival called Woodstock, and the monstrous crowd of 500,000 only disgusted Jack. Too anti-technological to take much pleasure in Neal Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin's footsteps on the moon, Jack was too gentle to enjoy Ho Chi Minh's death in September. The fall's bestselling books--Jacqueline Susanne's The Love Machine, "Penelope Ashe's" Naked Came the Stranger, Philip Roth's Portnoy's Complaint, Harold Robbin's The Inheritors--offended Jack's prudish nature, and seemed to him symptomatic of a prurient, exploitative culture in turmoil.

President Nixon's Department of Justice began to prosecute the "Chicago Eight" for their involvement in the past year's Democratic Convention riot. The top selling

record album of the autumn, "Volunteers" by "The Jefferson Airplane," was merely another signal of collapse. "We are forces of chaos and anarchy," screamed the Airplane's Grace Slick, "Everything they say we are, we are. And we are very proud of ourselves . . . Up against the wall, mother-fucker."

And always there was the War. Thirty-eight thousand, nine-hundred and sixty-nine Americans had died in Vietnam as students across the nation demonstrated on October 15, 1969, Moratorium Day. Jack shuddered and tried to enjoy a televised miracle, as the New York Mets rode fate to a glorious victory in the World Series.

Aside from his television set, Jack lived by his telephone, which he'd had installed only late in September. One person he no longer called was Carolyn Cassady, whom he had caught just in from a party the previous Easter, too drunk and exhausted to talk. In the past year she had invited him to come and stay with her--"Carolyn," he groaned, "I can't hardly get myself to the bathroom to take a leak"--but now she refused this call, and he didn't bother to try again. As October wore on, he called Greg Zahos and Jim Sampas, who weren't at home. Jim was a member of the Foreign Service and another of Sammy's brothers, and he was in Iceland when Jack called about building a cabin on some land he

owned in Massachusetts.

Kerouac spoke with Bob Burford, his friend from the long-ago summer of 1947 in Denver. John Holmes received a typically drunken late-night message from Jack, who in the midst of shouting at Stella challenged him to "call me back if you really love me." This time, Holmes didn't call back. And of course Jack reached out to Tony Sampas, calling him at four in the morning on October 18 to tell him that he wanted to return to Lowell in the spring, and perhaps come back alone for a week or two in the near future.6

Monday, October 20, was much like any other day. After a sleepless night, Jack went in to talk with Memere about four in the morning. They reminisced about some old letters he'd found the night before, one of which mentioned Papa Leo and his shop, the Spotlight Print. At nine Stella fixed breakfast, and Jack tried to work on a new book about the years after the publication of On the Road, which he thought he might call "The Beat Spotlight" in homage to Leo. It was hot and boring and soon he quit to continue drinking and pass away his time with the vacuous TV program "The Galloping Gourmet." Even in front of the television set he had his notebook open, and while munching a can of tuna fish he made another notation.

But the years of heavy drinking had weakened his esophygeal vein--the main blood vessel of his digestive tract--and the tuna fish was too much for it. It ruptured and he began to bleed internally.

"Stella, help me," he moaned from the bathroom, and there was something in his voice that brought her running into the toilet just as he began to vomit blood; "I'm hemorrhaging, I'm hemorrhaging," he cried. She got him to St. Anthony's Hospital and the doctors worked furiously, pumping thirty pints of blood into his body over the next twenty hours. But he had wanted to die for a long time; suicide--except for the slow suicide of whiskey--was something he could not countenance, but now all he had to do was let go. At 5:30 A.M., October 21, 1969, Jack died. As an old friend noted, he was "Gone in October," his cleansing, creative month.

John Holmes heard the news on the radio and was overwhelmed by a sense of his indebtedness to Jack, then wounded by a cold touch of his own mortality and loneliness. Allen and Peter and Gregory were at the farm they owned in upstate New York when the news reached them, and they walked into the woods and, "in the name of American poetry," carved Jack's initials into a tree. Holmes called, and they quickly agreed to meet at Allen's scheduled reading at Yale University

the next night. It was a time when they did not want to be alone.[7]

Now that Kerouac was dead, the tributes rolled in. Though some obituaries were hostile, most were at least gentle. The New York Times was dignified and more accurate about him than usual, but it was Jack's hometown Boston Globe that ran an editorial which mourned him and attributed his pain and death to the fact that he had tried to tell the truth. Although Harvard was engulfed in political strife and Kerouac was supposedly passé, the Harvard Crimson eulogized, "We should say a prayer for him: God give us the strength to be as alive as Kerouac was. Send us more to help burn away the bullshit." Time sneered and the National Review tried to exploit his death ideologically, but the youth culture's own Rolling Stone paid sincere tribute in "Elegy for a Desolation Angel."

Later, Ken Kesey would say, "I feel bad about Kerouac. He was a prophet and we let him die from us. He did know, and he did care, and the letters of praise that I composed in my head to him would have made a difference." Gregory Corso eulogized Jack in one of his greatest poems, proudly chanting through the tears,

> and as long as America shall
> live, though yee old Kerouac body hath died,
> Yet shall you live . . .
> Aye the America so embodied in thee, so
> definitely
> therefrom, is the living embodiment
> of all rooted
> humanity, young and free.[8]

On Thursday the 23rd friends and family gathered in Lowell, the circle of life come full for Jack's wake. The ritual took place at the Archambault Funeral Home, a chillingly familiar scene from Dr. Sax; Jean Louis Lebris de Kerouac had truly come home. He lay in the coffin in an incongruous black and white checked sport coat, white shirt and red bow tie, rosary beads in his hands, the make-up on his face cold to the touch. Allen, Peter, Gregory, John and Shirley arrived, and Jack's town and city friends greeted each other united in loss. There was no bitterness. Stella cried out, "All of you! Why didn't you come to Florida when he needed you?" But then she kissed and hugged everyone, for it was much too late for recriminations. Years later Allen even visited Memere and Stella in Florida, slept in Jack's bed and sang Blake's "Lamb" to the ancient woman who'd hated him so long.

A reporter for the Boston underground newspaper The Phoenix saw the staid, well-dressed Sampases who made up most of the mourners and concluded that it was only the "Kerouac wake"; the farewell to the man of myth and dream and legend that was the "Duluoz wake" must have taken place long ago.

He was wrong. Most of the Sampases and the New York

people went to bed that night after quiet talk and drink, but the Duluoz wake at Nikky's began at ten that evening and ran until dawn. The booze came off the top shelf, old Kerouac tapes replaced the jukebox, and Tony, Billy Koumantzelis, Paul Lekas and Gerard Wagner swapped old stories and drained their glasses in memoriam. Two drag queens added a note of raunchy humor to the proceedings, particularly when a pair of salesmen wandered in by mistake and tried to pick up the "ladies." At gray dawn the mourners went to a funky Greek diner straight out of Visions of Cody called the Royal Grill and breakfasted with the pimps and the hookers, the milkmen and the other fugitives of the dawn patrol.

Friday morning, Sterling Lord and Jimmy Breslin came from New York City, Robert Creeley from Buffalo, Jack's bibliographer Ann Charters from Connecticut, Edie Parker his first wife from Detroit, the past re-forming yet once more in farewell. The funeral was at St. Jean de Baptiste Cathedral, where Jack had been an altar boy thirty-five years before. Father "Spike" Morrisette, the young seminarian who had befriended him, eulogized Jack with a simple, righteous blessing.

They took the body to the Sampas family plot at Edson Cemetary and they buried Jack Kerouac. Even though there would be no marker for several years, it became a site of pilgrimage, as dozens of wanderers would stop to

commune with his spirit, perhaps say a prayer or leave a note. Later Bob Dylan would sit there and listen to Allen Ginsberg read the "Wheel of the Quivering Meat Conception" chorus from Mexico City Blues. Eventually the stone would read "He Honored Life." A little corny, Allen thought--"He honored death, too."9

Allen and John and Peter threw handfuls of dirt on the coffin, stared silently for long moments, then walked away. At long last Jack had joined Gerard and Leo and Nin in the New England earth.

The road endures.

NOTES

PREFACE

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CHAPTER VI

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CHAPTER X

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CHAPTER XI

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CHAPTER XIII

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CHAPTER XIV

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